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JD(S) to expel Prajwal over sex scandal

Amid attacks by Congress, HDK tries to distance JD(S) ally BJP and Modi from the case

SHIVAMOGGA, 29 APRIL

JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy on Monday said the party has decided to suspend Prajwal Revanna, his nephew and Hassan MP who is a Lok Sabha poll candidate in the current elections, over allegations of his sexual abuse of several women.

The former chief minister also sought to distance JD(S)'s alliance partner BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi from the case, amid attacks by the ruling Congress seeking their response on the issue.

Prajwal is the BJP-JD(S) alliance candidate for the Lok Sabha election from Hassan constituency, which went to the polls on Friday.

"A decision was already made. Tomorrow it is to be recommended at the core committee meeting in Hubballi. Because he (Prajwal) is a Member of Parliament, it has to be done from Delhi. So I had requested Deve Gowda (JD(S) National President and former prime minisrer). Neither he (Gowda) nor I were aware of this issue," Kumaraswamy claimed.

Speaking to reporters here, the JD(S) state chief said, "Some issues that have come out, on the basis of that it has been decided yesterday itself to suspend (him). But many were in a hurry."

PHOTO: PTI

> **Wrong is wrong, irrespective of who has committed it. If Prajwal is wrong, our family is in agreement for action to be taken against him**
>
> -HD Kumaraswamy, JD(S) leader

The 33-year-old Prajwal Revanna is the son of HD Revanna, former Prime Minister and JD(S) patriarch H D Deve Gowda's elder son who is an MLA and former minister.

Many explicit video clips allegedly involving Prajwal Revanna sexually abusing several women started making the rounds in Hassan in recent days.

The government has constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the alleged sex scandal involving the MP.

Kumaraswamy said that in his opinion, along with the SIT investigating the sexual abuse allegations against Prajwal, what also needs to be inquired into is where the pen-drives (containing alleged explicit video clips) were created and who circulated it in large numbers. "So far, there are no direct allegations against Prajwal. If the charges are true...punishment should happen in accordance with law. There is no compromise. If Prajwal is wrong, our family is in agreement for action to be taken against him," he said.

Reacting to Congress leaders trying to target BJP and PM Modi on the issue, Kumaraswamy said, "Did Modi come for Prajwal Revanna's campaigning? What does Modi have to do with this case? What does the BJP have to do with this? Why link this with them? What does Deve Gowda or Kumaraswamy have to do with this?" —*PTI*

>>>More on Pages 2 & 3

Cong protests against Prajwal in B'luru

BENGALURU, 29 APRIL

Congress on Monday held protests in Karnataka demanding the immediate arrest of Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna, who is facing allegations of sexually abusing hundreds of women.

Congress workers -- with women members joining in large numbers -- took to the streets in Hubballi, Hassan and Bengaluru, among other places, seeking action against the 33-year-old grandson of JD(S) Chief and former prime minister HD Deve Gowda.

In Bengaluru, the protest was led by All India Mahila Congress President Alka Lamba outside the office of Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee. Lamba said the horrifying case of sexual violence against hundreds of women has shocked the nation. "More than 3,000 videos with hundreds of women being sexually harassed, violated and even brutalised by MP Prajwal Revanna over the past few years have shaken the conscience of Kannadigas and Indians alike," she said.

All India National Women Congress President Alka Lamba and others demand arrest of Prajwal Revanna, near KPCC office in Bengaluru on Monday

PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

All India Mahila Congress and Karnataka Mahila Congress also staged a protest outside the offices of Director General of Police and Inspector General of Police in Bengaluru on Monday. Karnataka Mahila Congress President Pushpa Amarnath demanded Prajwal's arrest, alleging that BJP had shielded those accused of sexual crimes. "We have filed a complaint seeking action from the DGP. Tomorrow (on Tuesday) we will meet him again but as of now we have given a request letter," Amarnath said. "No one should rescue or support him in this. As we have seen, the Central government of BJP these days always supports and rescues the culprits and rapists, so this time it should not happen," she added. —*PTI/ANI*

5 students from B'luru drown in Mekedatu

BENGALURU, 29 APRIL

Five students drowned to death in the Cauvery River at the Mekedatu in Ramanagara district on Monday. A group of 12 college students from Bengaluru made a trip to Mekedatu. The students were crossing the river when they got stuck in the whirlpool. Police identified the deceased as Varsha,20, a student of KLE College Abhishek ,20, a computer science student from Malleswaram Government College, Harpita NL ,20, a second-year engineering student from Chikkabanavara RR College, Tejas 21, pursuing BCA from Vijayanagar Government College, and Neha ,19, studying Chemistry at KLE. College, RR Nagar. A case has been registered at the Sathanur police station. —*Salar News*

Shah's chopper loses control, grazes ground

BEGUSARAI, 29 APRIL

Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday escaped a major accident after his helicopter lost balance in Bihar Begusarai. Shah was in Begusarai to address a public meeting. A video clip shows Shah's helicopter ascending, only to sway to its right, nearly grazing the ground. However, pilot quickly regained control, allowing the chopper to stabilise and resume its flight. Government sources clarified that there were no "issues" with the chopper The reports suggested that the chopper faced issues with balance amid strong winds. —*Salar News*

ICG apprehends fishing boat with 173 kg of narcotics

AHMEDABAD/ NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) has seized 173kg of narcotics from an Indian fishing boat and detained two crew members on board the vessel off the Gujarat coast, an official said on Monday. The ICG and Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) apprehended the fishing boat in a joint operation in the high seas on Sunday afternoon. The seizure comes a day after the ICG, ATS and Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), in a joint operation, recovered heroin worth Rs 600 crore from a Pakistani boat with 14 crew members. The boat was intercepted after its proper identification, and investigations confirmed that the two accused were involved in smuggling 173 kg of drugs. —*PTI*

HC junks hate speech plea against PM

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

Delhi High Court on Monday dismissed a petition that sought directions to disqualify Prime Minister Narendra Modi from contesting elections for six years for allegedly seeking votes in the name of deities, saying the plea was "thoroughly misconceived".

Justice Sachin Datta said the plea was "devoid of any merits". Petitioner Anand S Jondhale, a lawyer, had urged the Court to take action against Modi for allegedly seeking votes in the name of gods and places of worship, saying this amounted to violating the model code of conduct and committing an offence under the Indian Penal Code and Representation of the People Act.

Delhi High Court PHOTO: PTI

High Court said once the petitioner submitted a complaint to the Election Commission of India (ECI) on 10 April, there was no occasion for him to invoke the extraordinary jurisdiction of this court even before the disposal of the complaint by ECI. It further said ECI is obliged to take an independent view on the complaint of the petitioner and if he is aggrieved by it, he is free to take the recourse of appropriate remedy available under the law. The petition said Modi delivered a speech in Pilibhit on 9 April where he "not only sought votes in the name of Hindu and Sikh deities and their places of worship but also made comments against Opposition parties as favouring Muslims". —*PTI*

Cong candidate withdraws nomination from Indore

INDORE, 29 APRIL

In a major setback to Congress in Madhya Pradesh, its Indore Lok Sabha seat candidate Akshay Kanti Bam withdrew his nomination on Monday, a fortnight before polling in the constituency.

He is likely to join BJP. Indore Collector Ashish Singh confirmed that Bam has withdrawn his nomination.

Senior BJP leader and state cabinet minister Kailash Vijayvargiya posted a picture on his X account in which Bam was seen sitting in a car.

Local BJP MLA Ramesh Mendola was also seen accompanying them in the car. Mendola is a trusted associate of Vijayvargiya.

The minister said Bam was welcome to join the BJP.

Congress had fielded Bam, 45, a newbie in the poll arena, against sitting BJP MP Shankar Lalwani, 62, from Indore Lok Sabha seat, which is a stronghold of the saffron party. Polling in Indore will be held on 13 May. Meanwhile, police have been deployed outside Bam's house in Patrakar Colony. Local Congress leaders started gathering outside his house. Bam has not contested any election in his political career so far.

Congress offered him the opportunity to contest from Indore at a time when several party workers, including three former MLAs of the party, have switched sides and joined the BJP ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. —*PTI*

OLA CEO QUITS, FIRM TO LAY OFF 10-15% STAFF

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

Ride-hailing company Ola Mobility CEO Hemant Bakshi has resigned from the company within four months of joining it, according to sources privy to the development.

Sources also said that the company is planning to lay off 10-15 per cent employees.

Bakshi had joined the company in January, 2024.

Another source said the company had around 900 people in the Ola Cabs division in January and the lay-off might impact 90-140 people. When contacted, Ola declined to offer any comment on the information. —*PTI*

STATE'S HIGHEST TEMPERATURE

Raichur sizzles at 43°C, B'luru burns at 38.5°C

BENGALURU/ T'PURAM, 29 APRIL

For the second consecutive day, the maximum temperature in Bengaluru City stayed at 38.5 degree Celsius, said CP Patil, Director of Meteorological Centre, Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), Bengaluru, whereas Raichur hit the highest in the state at 43 degrees Celsius. IMD had earlier predicted that Bengaluru maximum temperature will touch 39 degrees Celsius today. While the highest maximum temperature recorded in Karnataka was in Raichur at 43 degrees Celsius, other districts in North Karnataka, namely Haveri, Vijayapura, Bagalkot, Kalaburagi and Koppal, witnessed a maximum temperature of over 40 degrees Celsius. In South Karnataka, Davangere and Chikkanahalli saw maximum temperatures go over 40 degrees Celsius.

PHOTO: PTI

IMD on Monday sounded an 'orange alert' in Kerala's Palakkad district due to the possibility of a heatwave.

The state government has announced the closure of educational institutions in Palakkad and have instructed people to be cautious during hot days. —*PTI*

WOMAN'S BURIAL DELAYED OVER ₹25K DONATION

CHIKKABALLAPUR, 29 APRIL

A Scheduled Caste woman's cremation was halted in Gauribidanur on Sunday, just because her family allegedly failed to donate Rs 25,000 to temple.

The deceased, Hanumakka, 55, who belonged to the Adi Karnataka community, died on Saturday in the 26th ward of Gotakanapur in Gauribidanur. As per tradition, community leaders insisted on a donation of Rs 25,000 to the Satyamma deity temple before permitting the cremation. Ultimately, the family managed to arrange Rs 3,000, which they handed over to the temple authorities. Only then they were granted permission to proceed with the cremation. On Monday, tahsildar Mahesh Metri and other officials visited the spot and made the community to return Rs 3,000 to the family of deceased. —*Salar News*

U'khand suspends Patanjali's licence

DEHRADUN, 29 APRIL

Uttarakhand government has suspended the manufacturing licences of 14 products made by Baba Ramdev's Patanjali Ayurved, according to a notification dated 24 April.

The government has put suspended the licences for publishing misleading advertisements about the efficacy of Patanjali Ayurved products, as per the government order showed.

Supreme Court had repeatedly criticised Ramdev for not complying with its directives to stop misleading advertisements of some of his products. The Supreme Court will be hearing Patanjali's case on Tuesday to determine whether to invoke contempt charges against Ramdev or not.

The apex court is hearing a plea filed by Indian Medical Association (IMA) in 2022 alleging a smear campaign against the Covid vaccination drive and modern systems of medicine. Last month, the top court had asked Ramdev, his aide Acharya Balakrishnan and Patanjali Ayurved Ltd last month to issue a public apology for not following its orders on misleading ads. —*Agencies*

STATE MOURNS

BJP MP, ex-min Srinivas Prasad dead

BENGALURU, 29 APRIL

Veteran politician, BJP MP and former Union minister V Srinivas Prasad died on Monday, family sources said.

The 76-year-old Lok Sabha member from Chamarajnagar was ailing for some time and being treated at a private hospital, where he passed away early on Monday. Prasad is survived by wife and three daughters. His final rites will be conducted in accordance with Buddhism on Tuesday afternoon in Mysuru.

Schools, colleges, and government offices in Mysuru and Chamarajanagar will remain closed on Tuesday.

He was a six-time MP from Chamarajanagar and also served as MLA from Nanjangud in Mysuru district for two terms. On 18 March this year, Prasad announced his retirement from electoral politics, marking his 50 years in public life. A champion of Dalit community, Prasad first contested Assembly elections as an independent in 1974. Prasad joined the erstwhile Janata Party in 1976 and switched over to Congress in 1979. He also had a stint with JD(S), JD (U), and Samata Party before crossing over to BJP.Prasad served as Union Minister of State for Consumer Affairs Food and Public Distribution in Atal Bihari Vajpayee government from 1999 to 2004. He returned to Congress fold later, got elected as an MLA in 2013 and became Revenue Minister in Siddaramaiah government.

Srinivas Prasad PHOTO: PTI

In 2016, Prasad resigned from Assembly and rejoined BJP. He contested the 2017 Nanjangud bypolls on a BJP ticket but lost. He then successfully fought Lok Sabha election from Chamarajanagar in 2019.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah described Prasad as a strong voice for the oppressed Dalits. "The departure of the leader who lived the struggle against injustice and inequality is a big setback for the political struggle for social justice in the State," he added. "He was a progressive-thinking political leader. Although we worked with different parties for a long time in the old Mysuru region, we maintained a respectful relationship with each other," the CM said. BJP stalwart and former chief minister BS Yediyurappa said: "I met him only a few days ago and I can't believe that he is not with us now. He was recognised as an influential Dalit leader who had made his mark in the politics of the State and the country." —*PTI/Salar News*

Shah's 'doctored' video: Cops summons T'gana CM

NEW DELHI/HYDERABAD, 29 APRIL

Delhi Police has summoned Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy on 1 May for questioning in a case of a doctored video of Union Home Minister Amit Shah circulated on social media and police in some BJP-ruled states also swung into action making the first arrest in Assam.

Notices have been issued to five members of the Telangana Congress, including its Chief Reddy, who posted the video on X, sources said, adding that a team of Delhi Police's Special Cell handed over a notice to the Chief Minister's Office on Monday.

They have been asked to appear with their mobile phones, laptops, tablets or any other electronic device through which they have created, uploaded and tweeted the video on their X accounts, the sources said. Addressing a Congress rally at Sedam in Karnataka,Reddy said "no one here is afraid" of such notices and alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is now using Delhi Police to win elections. The Special Cell of the Delhi Police had on Sunday registered an FIR which is under the Ministry of Home Affairs, filed a complaint about the doctored video of Shah where his statements indicating a commitment to abolish quota for Muslims on religious ground in Telangana were changed to make it seem that he was advocating scrapping of all reservations. —*PTI*

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PHOTO: PTI

Veteran politician SM Krishna hospitalised

BENGALURU, 29 APRIL

Veteran politician and former chief minister SM Krishna is undergoing treatment for a "minor ailment", the private hospital where he has been admitted said on Monday. The 91-year-old is "medically stable" and is recovering well, it said. Manipal Hospital said the former Union minister is being treated under Dr Satyanarayana Mysore and a team of medical experts. "Krishna is medically stable. He is recovering well and there is no need for worry," the hospital said. The veteran politician was reportedly admitted to another super-speciality hospital in the City earlier this month, as he suffered an acute respiratory infection, and was discharged after treatment. Krishna was chief minister from 11 October, 1999, to 28 May, 2004. *—PTI*

Sharankumar Modi booked for 'bribery': EC

BENGALURU, 29 APRIL

Election Commission on Monday said that a case has been booked against Congress leader Sharankumar Modi and three others over bribery allegations after Rs 1.99 crore cash was seized from their possession. The move came after Income Tax officials on Saturday morning seized the undocumented amount which was being transported in Modi's car. Taking to 'X', Karnataka Chief Electoral Officer said that an FIR was registered against Congress leader and former mayor of Kalaburagi, Sharankumar Modi, and three others at Wadi Railway police station on 28 April and Rs 1.99 crore was seized which was in their possession. FIR was registered under section 123 of Representation of the People Act . *—PTI*

Siddaramaiah to continue as CM, says H Anjaneya

DAVANAGERE, 29 APRIL

Former Minister H Anjaneya in a statement hinted that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah would continue to be in power till term ends. He also asserted that the guarantee scheme would not be discontinued even after the conclusion of Lok Sabha elections. Amid criticisms from Opposition regarding the financial sustainability of such schemes, Anjaneya highlighted Siddaramaiah's economic capability and positive impact of the scheme on State's development. Acknowledging Siddaramaiah's leadership and expertise in economic matters, he also highlighted the significance of the scheme in fostering growth and ensuring social welfare. *—Salar News*

Man in trouble for using PM's name in wedding card

MANGALURU, 29 APRIl

A groom found himself embroiled in controversy after his wedding invitation sparked debate over his political affiliation, police said on Monday. The focal point of contention was the tagline in the wedding invitation: "The best present you will give the couple is electing Modi as PM once again," it said. Uppinangady police in Dakshina Kannada registered an FIR after a complaint was lodged by one of the groom's relatives to the Election Commission regarding the tagline. Based on the complaint, Election Commission officials visited the groom's residence in Puttur taluk on 14 April. The groom said the invitations were printed on 1 March, before the election dates were announced. He also said the tagline expresses admiration for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and concern for the nation. *—PTI*

Will take action if Prajwal is guilty: HDK

Prajwal is BJP-JD(S) alliance's candidate from Hassan, which went to elections on Friday

NSUI members demand arrest of MP Prajwal Revanna in alleged sex scandal, during their protest in front of the residence of former CM HD Kumaraswamy at JP Nagar in Bengaluru on Monday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

SHIVAMOGGA, 29 APRIL

JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy on Monday said there is no question of defending his nephew and Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna over sexual abuse allegations against him, and the party will take "merciless action" if Special Investigation Team's probe proves the charges.

Prajwal is BJP-JD(S) alliance's candidate from Hassan which went to the polls on Friday.

Former chief minister Kumaraswamy, who is also the State JD(S) chief, strongly objected to the names of his father and former prime minister HD Deve Gowda, among other family members, being drawn into the controversy. "Whoever has committed the wrong has to bow down as per the law of the land," Kumaraswamy said. "I want to ask Congress leaders, why bring family into it? Discuss about the individual. An individual and his deeds are in question here, not the family... why bring the family's name, Deve Gowda's name or Kumaraswamy's name?" he added.

The 33-year-old Prajwal Revanna is the son of HD Revanna, former prime minister and JD(S) patriarch Gowda's elder son who is an MLA and former minister.

Several video clips allegedly involving Prajwal sexually abusing hundreds of women had started making the rounds in Hassan in recent days. The government has constituted an SIT to investigate the alleged sexual abuse of hundreds of women by the MP.

He said, "An FIR has been registered, the inquiry report has to come. Let the SIT inquiry report come out, we don't have any objections. There is no question of influencing anyone. Let the facts come out. Action should be taken against those involved. That is my stand and that of my party," he added.

Police have information that Prajwal has left the country, according to a statement issued by the Chief Minister's Office, which announced the SIT probe.

About Prajwal's whereabouts, Kumaraswamy said, "What should I say, if you ask me? Will he ask me and go anywhere...They, the government will take action."

To a question whether he had any prior information about what was happening, he said, "Where did we know about the matter? They (Revanna family) are separate. If it had come to our notice we could have taken action and stopped this embarrassment from happening. This matter is about an individual's background. Can we watch where he goes or comes every day? Is it in our hands?" *—PTI/ANI*

'Harassment case is a conspiracy'

Hassan, 29 April

The mother-in-law of the woman who raised sexual assault allegations against MP Prajwal Revanna has labelled the issue as a conspiracy to tarnish the reputation of former prime minister HD Deve Gowda's family during the elections. Saying the complaint was false, the mother-in-law questioned the timing of the allegations and asked why the complainant was silent for five years. She defended the integrity of the Gowda family, highlighting their long-standing contributions to politics without any blemish. The family distanced themselves from any involvement in the alleged obscene video. *—Salar News*

Politics behind charges against me and my son, says HD Revanna

BENGALURU, 29 APRIL

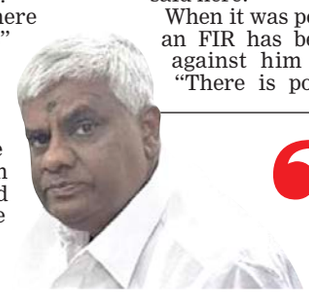
JD(S) MLA and former minister HD Revanna on Monday said he was open to an investigation over the allegations of sexual abuse involving his son and Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna and himself, and said they were ready to face action in accordance with law, if the charges are proved.

Alleging that there was "politics" behind the issue, the elder son of JD(S) patriarch and former prime minister HD Deve Gowda said his son Prajwal would "join" the probe "whenever he is asked to". The government has constituted an SIT to probe the alleged sexual abuse of hundreds of women by the MP.

"We are here, we will face it legally... This is some four or five year old case and they have raised it now and are booking a case...I will not react to this issue, as the case has been given to SIT and their investigation should not be hindered," HD Revanna said here.

When it was pointed out that an FIR has been registered against him too, he said, "There is politics, I don't want to comment. They (Congress) are in government and they will do whatever they want."

He said, "All these things are not just today, the Deve Gowda family in the last 40 years (has been targeted by) Congress. CoD (now CID), Lokayukta probe, we have been facing for the last 40 years... I don't want to react to anything...let them take action in accordance with law," he said, adding that he hasn't spoken to Deve Gowda on the issue. *—PTI*



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>
> -HD Revanna, JD(S) MLA

BJP helped Prajwal flee to Germany, says Priyank

BENGALURU, 29 APRIL

Amid reports about Janata Dal (Secular) MP Prajwal Revanna fleeing to Germany, IT & BT Minister Priyank Kharge on Monday claimed that it is BJP that has helped Hassan MP escape authorities in an alleged sexual abuse case.

"Today, if he's left the country as the rumours are being floated, then how did he leave the country? Who facilitated it? I'm directly blaming the BJP on this front."

Kharge slammed BJP-JD(S) alliance for fielding Revanna again in Lok Sabha elections and questioned their silence over the matter. "Despite knowing the fact that the Hassan MP (Prajwal Revanna) was known for such antecedents, despite letters being received by them from BJP functionaries, from BJP office-bearers, that there are thousands of victims who have been abused by the Hassan MP. Still, they went in and gave the ticket. They were so quick to capitalise on the Hubballi murder case. Why are they so silent now? Why aren't they protesting in every village like they did during the Hubballi murder?" he asked.

Why are BJP & NCW silent: Hebbalkar

Women and Child Development Minister Laxmi Hebbalkar raised questions about BJP's alliance with JD(S). Hebbalkar criticised BJP leadership for their silence on the matter, questioning the party's commitment to women's safety and decency in politics. "Our CM has formed an SIT but I just want to know the stand of BJP. Where is NCW chief Rekha Sharma? Where is JP Nadda, and why is he not saying anything? I want to know if BJP will remain in alliance with JD(S) or not after this," Hebbalkar said. *—ANI*

JD(S) MLA wants expulsion of Revanna & son

BENGALURU, 29 APRIL

A JD(S) MLA on Monday demanded the expulsion from the party of MLA and former minister HD Revanna and his son and MP Prajwal, who have been booked for sexual harassment and criminal intimidation by police.

The MLA from Mulbagal in Kolar district Samruddhi V Manjunath said the charges against the father-son duo have embarrassed the party workers so much that they do not wish to even take the name of their party. "In the recent days, 'Hassan's Leelas' are shining all over in the media, which has not just embarrassed ordinary workers in the state, but they feel ashamed to even mention the name of the party," the MLA said in a post on 'X'.

"As a first-time MLA, I am in a pitiable situation of not being able to answer the questions asked by the media," he said. *—PTI*

Congress wants quota based on religion: PM

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a public meeting for Lok Sabha elections, in Bagalkot on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

BAGALKOT, 29 APRIL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday accused Congress of planning religion-based reservation in the country for the sake of vote bank politics, but asserted that he will not let it happen.

He said this Congress proposal is to appease minorities as the SC/ST and OBC community is now with BJP.

"In Karnataka, Congress has started a campaign to change the Constitution and to snatch away the rights of SC/ST and OBCs. Our Constitution does not accept religion-based reservation. But Karnataka government has given part of OBC reservation to Muslims," Modi said.

"I want to make my Dalit, SC/ST and OBC brothers and sisters aware about Congress' intentions. These people on the basis of religion, to keep their vote bank safe, are planning to loot your right which was given by Babasaheb Ambedkar and the Constitution," he added.

Veteran BJP leader BS Yediyurappa, BJP candidates and MPs from Bagalkot and Vijayapura -- PC Gaddigoudar and Ramesh Jigajinagi, respectively -- were among those present at the rally.

Noting that most of SC, ST and OBC MPs in the Parliament are from BJP, Modi said, "So they feel that as SC, ST and OBC are with BJP. To gain the trust of minorities, they want to loot from SC, ST and OBC and give it to minorities. Will you let this happen?" he added. *—PTI*

MGNREGS workers unpaid: Cong rips BJP

BENGALURU, 29 APRIL

Jairam Ramesh *PHOTO: PTI*

Attacking the Modi government over key issues in Karnataka, Congress on Monday questioned the "delay" in the vital Bagalkot-Kudachi Railway line project and also asked when it is going to pay the state's MGNREGS workers their wages.

Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh posed questions to Prime Minister Narendra Modi ahead of his rally in Bagalkot in Karnataka.

"Why has the Modi Government failed to deliver the Bagalkot-Kudachi Railway line? Why is the Modi Government holding up the Upper Bhadra and Mahadayi projects? When will the PM pay Karnataka's MGNREGA workers?" Ramesh said on X.

Elaborating on what he said were "jumla details", Ramesh said the Bagalkot-Kudachi line of the South-Western Railway has now been delayed by more than eight years.

As of today, only 33 per cent, or 46 km of the 142 km line has been completed, he said.

Despite the Karnataka government providing the land for the project free of cost, and contributing 50 per cent of the construction cost, the Modi government has "failed" to deliver on this project, he said.

He said that in order to help alleviate the drought-related stress on the rural economy, the Karnataka government has sought to increase the number of working-days under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) from 100 to 150.

"There is a provision in the scheme to do so during periods of drought. However, the Modi Sarkar has not only failed to approve the extension of the scheme, it has also failed to release Rs. 1600 crore towards the payment of wages to those working under MGNREGS," Ramesh said. *—PTI*

ROW OVER DROUGHT FUND

₹3,400 crore released to State for drought: Centre tells apex court

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

PHOTO: PTI

- Centre told the top court that EC had given clearance to it to deal with issue raised by Karnataka

Centre on Monday told Supreme Court that around Rs 3,400 crore has been released to Karnataka government for drought management in the State.

A bench of Justices BR Gavai and Sandeep Mehta was hearing a plea filed by Karnataka government seeking a direction to Centre to release financial assistance from National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) to the State for drought management.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Karnataka, said Rs 3,450 crore has been released but the State's request was for assistance of Rs 18,000 crore. Referring to a chart annexed in the State's petition, he said it relates to the claims made in accordance with the policy of the Centre.

On 22 April, Centre had told the top court that Election Commission had given clearance to it to deal with the issue raised by Karnataka regarding financial assistance for drought management.

It said the state is reeling under "severe drought", affecting the lives of its people and for the Kharif 2023 season, which starts in June and ends in September, a total of 223 out of 236 taluks are declared as drought-affected. *—PTI*

Sriramulu is doing politics of convenience, says DKS

BENGALURU, 29 APRIL

DK Shivakumar *PHOTO: PTI*

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar challenged the decision of B Sriramulu to contest as BJP candidate from Ballari in Lok Sabha elections despite being a sitting MLA.

"Sriramulu is doing politics of convenience. Why did he contest the parliamentary elections when he was a sitting MLA? BJP MPs from Ballari never raised their voice for the district. Sriramulu was a minister when the BJP double-engine government was in power. How many grants did he get for the district and what development did he carry out? Has Achche din come? Have you got Rs 15 lakh in your account? Nirmala Sitharaman announced a Rs 20 lakh package for COVID relief, did anyone from the district benefit from it? No," he said at Kudligi in Vijayanagara. Ballari can't forget the contribution of Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh to get special status to Kalyana Karnataka. *—Salar News*

SHARAVATHI PROJECT

L&T loses battle against KPCL

BENGALURU, 29 APRIL

Sharavathi Generating Station *PHOTO: KPCL.KARNATAKA.GOV.IN*

Engineering giant Larsen & Toubro (L&T) has lost a legal battle against Karnataka Power Corporation Ltd (KPCL), with the Karnataka High Court ruling in favour of KPCL regarding the tender for Rs 8,300 crore Sharavathi Pumped Storage Power Project. L&T, which did not participate in the tender, raised objections, alleging that the process was conducted with undue haste.

The project is part of KPCL's efforts to address Karnataka's electricity shortage. Down To Earth previously reported that the tendering process for the pumped storage was initiated on 2 February, and lasted only 21 days. The timeline provided for contractor inquiries and clarifications was notably brief, spanning just four days.

Justice M Nagaprasanna, presiding over the single-member bench, dismissed L&T's plea, stating that a non-participant in a tender process should not seek to halt it. L&T then appealed, contending that the 21-day tender period was unusually short, typically requiring at least 90 days, arguing that this was meant to benefit specific bidders.

However, the division bench, chaired by Chief Justice NV Anjaria and Justice Krishna S Dixit, affirmed the legitimacy of the tender process, noting that KPCL had the authority to determine tender timelines and that L&T had participated in the pre-bid phase, making their objections inconsistent. *—PTI*

Repolling held peacefully at Chamarajanagar

BENGALURU, 29 APRIL

Repolling was held "peacefully" at a polling station in Indiganatha village of Hanur, which falls under Chamarajanagar Lok Sabha constituency on Monday, amid elaborate security arrangements, after a clash between groups on Friday resulted in damage to EVMs.

Polling began at 7am and ended by 6pm. Karnataka Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Kumar Meena said, "Repolling was good and it went peacefully. Almost 13.42 per cent votes have been cast." The repolling was ordered by the Election Commission following reports of damaged EVMs. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

SC adjourns former TN min Balaji's bail plea till 6 May

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

Supreme Court on Monday adjourned till 6 May the hearing on the bail plea of former Tamil Nadu minister V Senthil Balaji, arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) last year in connection with a money laundering case. A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan deferred the matter after a lawyer appearing for the agency sought an adjournment saying Solicitor General Tushar Mehta was not available. The lawyer told the bench that they have filed their reply in the matter. Senior advocate Aryama Sundaram, appearing for Balaji, urged the bench to hear the matter and contended that he had been inside jail for 320 days. The bench said it has not gone through ED's reply in the case and posted the matter for hearing on 6 May. —*PTI*

Mayawati's nephew booked for MCC violation

SITAPUR, 29 APRIL

A case has been registered against Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) leader and party's Chief Mayawati's political successor, Akash Anand for allegedly using unparliamentary words and made a statement to create enmity between people during a rally in Sitapur on Sunday, said police. The rally organized by the BSP in support of Mahendra Yadav at Raja College campus in the Kotwali police station area of Sitapur on Sunday. Superintendent of Police, Sitapur, Chakresh Mishra, confirmed the registration of the FIR and said, "Under the Kotwali Nagar PS area... during rally of BSP...speaker of this party Akash Anand used unparliamentary words and made a statement to create enmity between people. —*ANI*

Tripura BJP MLA gets poll violation notice

WEST TRIPURA, 29 APRIL

The Assistant Returning Officer of North Tripura district has issued a showcause notice to BJP MLA Jadab Lal Nath for his actions allegedly violating the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) on the day of the elections. Nath is an MLA from Bagbasa Assembly constituency under North Tripura district. The notice was issued pertaining to an incident that happened during the polling of the second phase of elections on 26 April. The BJP MLA, reportedly, entered the polling station and allegedly misbehaved with the booth level worker who had been assigned the task of supervising the voter's help desk. A press release has informed that the incident happened in the polling booth number 22. —*ANI*

2 Cong men post pics of rape survivor's kin

AIRAJPUR, 29 APRIL

Police on Monday registered a case against Madhya Pradesh Congress President Jitu Patwari and party MLA Vikrant Bhuria for allegedly disclosing the identity of family members of a 11-year-old victim of gang rape by posting their pictures on social media, an official said. Patwari and Bhuria, the MLA from Jhabua, and their supporters met family members of the rape survivor at a village under Jobat police station limits on Sunday. "Patwari and Bhuria visited the village to meet the rape victim's family members on Sunday afternoon. They later shared the pictures of the victim's family members on their X account in violation of the directives of the Supreme Court," said Superintendent of Police Rajesh Vyas. The tribal girl was allegedly raped by two boys, on Friday. —*PTI*

Will PM stay silent? Cong on K'taka sex scandal

Priyanka says the alleged incident ruined hundreds of lives

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

Congress on Monday attacked the BJP over the alleged sex scandal involving the grandson of JD(S) Supremo HD Deve Gowda, with party leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra asking whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi will remain silent on the matter.

The Opposition party also asked why BJP went ahead with its alliance with JD(S) when a BJP leader had written to the party's Karnataka unit President, exposing the presence of a pen drive full of "sleaze videos of Prajwal Revanna".

Congress also asked that whenever there is crime against women, Modi, his government, BJP and its machinery always protect the perpetrators of such crimes. A case of sexual harassment and stalking was registered on Sunday against Prajwal respectively.The case was registered on a complaint by their cook, who alleged that four months after she started working for them, Revanna used to sexually harass her and Prajwal used to make video calls to her daughter and have "vulgar conversations" with her.

> **Just hearing about his heinous crimes committed is heart-wrenching. This ruined the lives of hundreds of women. Modi ji, will you still remain silent?**
>
> -Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Congress General Secretary

PHOTO: PTI

On X, Priyanka Gandhi said, "The leader with whom the PM gets photographed by placing his hand on his shoulder. The leader for whom the PM himself campaigned 10 days ago. Praised him on stage. Today, that leader of Karnataka is absconding from the country."

"Just hearing about his heinous crimes committed is heart-wrenching. This ruined the lives of hundreds of women. Modi ji, will you still remain silent?" the Congress general secretary said.

Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh said that in December 2023 itself, a BJP leader had informed the party leadership about the atrocities of Prajwal Revanna.

"Even after knowing about the atrocities of Prajwal Revanna, the Prime Minister personally demanded votes for Prajwal and said that 'every vote received by Prajwal will strengthen Modi'. This is not surprising. Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, Kuldeep Sengar and now Prajwal Revanna - the Prime Minister has shown his true face time and again," Ramesh said on X.Congress' media and publicity department head Pawan Khera shared on X the letter written by BJP leader Devaraj Gowda to the Karnataka BJP president on December 8 last year. The letter exposed the presence of a pen drive full of "sleaze videos of Prajwal Revanna", he said. —*PTI*

Assam Cong war room man held for 'fake video' of Shah

GUWAHATI, 29 APRIL

One person was arrested on Monday for allegedly sharing a "fake video" of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Monday.

The arrested person, 31-year-old Reetom Singh, is associated with the Assam Congress and functions as the party's 'War Room Coordinator', according to his X profile.

"Assam police have arrested an individual named Sri Reetam Singh in connection with the fake video involving Honorable Home Minister Sri @AmitShah," Sarma said in a post on X. Guwahati resident's arrest was made on a day when Shah is in the state capital to campaign for of BJP candidate for Guwahati Lok Sabha seat - Bijuli Kalita Medhi. A Congress spokesperson said the party is not aware of any fake video and "it must have been shared in his personal capacity".

- He said police have seized two mobile phones and one laptop from Singh's possession

Assam Police Chief Public Relations Officer Pranabjyoti Goswami said in a statement that a case was registered at Panbazar police station based on a complaint regarding the circulation of a "distorted and motivated" post on X.

He said police have seized two mobile phones and one laptop from Singh's possession. —*PTI*

Delhi CM's wife Sunita, minister Atishi meet him in Tihar jail

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's wife Sunita and Cabinet Minister Atishi met him in Tihar jail on Monday, with the latter saying that he has directed to ensure that the city's residents do not face water woes during summer.

Sunita Kejriwal PHOTO: ANI

Sunita, whose application to meet her husband was earlier denied by the Tihar jail administration, was granted permission for the meeting on Monday, according to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).

She also said that Kejriwal asked her to ensure adequate water supply so that people do not face woes during summer.

"He has asked to pay special attention to this matter. He has also given a message for women. He said he will come out soon and has promised that Rs 1,000 honorarium will be given to them soon. A plan for the scheme is being made by him," said Atishi, who holds multiple portfolios, including education and water in the Delhi government.

Presenting the budget for the financial year 2024-25 in March, Delhi government had announced a monthly honorarium scheme of Rs 1,000 for women aged above 18.

She charged that the Central has "such hatred" for Kejriwal that they are making new rules.Also, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann will meet the AAP supremo on Tuesday. —*PTI*

BJP sues Kejri, Atishi for defamation

New Delhi, 29 April

A criminal complaint was filed against Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and his AAP colleague Atishi before a court here on Monday, accusing them of defaming BJP and its members. The complaint was filed by Praveen Shankar Kapoor, the media head of BJP's Delhi unit, before Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Tanya Bamniyal, who posted the matter for recording pre-summoning evidence on 4 May. The complaint alleged that the two AAP leaders made "false, fabricated, and manipulated statements", accusing the BJP of trying to buy and poach AAP MLAs and topple the state government, "with a malafide intention to lower BJP's and its workers' reputation in general public". —*PTI*

Kejri's decision to stay CM is personal, says Delhi HC

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

Delhi High Court on Monday said the decision of Arvind Kejriwal to continue as the Chief Minister after his arrest is "personal" but it does not mean that the fundamental rights of school-going children would be trampled upon. The high court also said that Kejriwal's absence cannot allow students to go through the first term without free text books, writing material and uniform in MCD schools.

High Court said that a Chief Minister's post in any state, leave alone a buzzing capital city like Delhi, is not a ceremonial post and it is a post where the office holder has to be virtually available 24*7 to deal with any crisis or natural disaster like flooding, fire and disease.

The court was dealing with a PIL by NGO Social Jurist, represented by advocate Ashok Agarwal, highlighting the non-supply of educational material and other statutory benefits to students in the MCD schools even after the commencement of the new academic session. —*PTI*

NON-BELIEVER'S PETITION

SC to hear plea challenging Shariat inheritance law

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

PHOTO: PTI

Supreme Court on Monday agreed to examine a plea seeking a declaration that people who do not want to be governed by Muslim Personal Law must be allowed to be governed by the secular law of the country.

A bench of Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud, Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, after elaborate discussions, issued notice to the Centre and the State of Kerala on the petition.

The bench asked the Attorney General for India, R Venkantramani, to nominate a law officer who can assist the court and posted the matter for hearing in the second week of July 2024.

The petition was filed by a Kerala-based woman named Safiya PM, who stated that she is a non-believer Muslim and hence should be governed by the Indian Succession Act 1925 with respect to inheritance instead of the Muslim Personal Law (Sharia Law).

She said that her father is a non-practicing Muslim but has not officially left the religion.

"As per Sharia law, the person who leaves her faith in Islam, will be ousted from her community and thereafter she is not entitled for any inheritance right in her parental property," the petition said.

The petition said that, as per Sharia law, a Muslim person cannot bequeath more than 1/3rd of his properties by way of will.

The plea added that her father cannot bequeath more than 1/3 of the property to her and the remaining 2/3 will go to her brother, who was suffering from Down's syndrome.

- The petition said that, as per Sharia law, a Muslim person cannot bequeath more than 1/3rd of his properties by way of will

It was further stated that the petitioner had a daughter and after the petitioner's death, the entire property will not go to her daughter as her father's brothers will also get a claim.

"The absence of any provision for having the inheritance rights, even after leaving the religion, puts the citizen in a dangerous situation as neither the secular laws of the State nor the religious laws would protect her. As per Sharia law, one who has left Islam will lose her inheritance rights. It is the prayer of the petitioner that she should be governed by the provisions of the Indian Succession Act, 1925," the petition stated. —*ANI*

NOTHING WRONG IN MEETING OPPN LEADERS: CPI(M)

T'PURAM, 29 APRIL

The ruling CPI(M) in Kerala on Monday defended party veteran and LDF Convenor EP Jayarajan and said there was nothing wrong with his meeting with senior BJP leader Prakash Javadekar.

The party said it was quite common for political leaders to meet their counterparts from other parties.

However, the Left party made it clear that directions have been given to Jayarajan to end his relationship with persons like TG Nandakumar, who allegedly played the role of a middleman by facilitating his alleged meeting with Javadekar, who is also the in-charge of BJP in the state.

While addressing a press conference at the AKG Centre here, CPI(M) State Secretary MV Govindan said some 'yellow journalism' is suggesting that the labourer's party will fall for right-wing politics with just a meeting with a BJP leader, but Left parties have a different history in Kerala.

He said Jayarajan himself had confirmed about the meeting, which had happened a year ago.

"Now this is being discussed as a big issue," Govindan said, answering a barrage of questions from the media. The whole issue was the result of a larger conspiracy by someone with absolute hatred for Communists and Jayarajan would take legal action against those who have been propagating utter lies with regard to this meeting. —*PTI*

ED gets notice on Soren's plea seeking interim relief

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

Hemant Soren PHOTO: PTI

Supreme Court on Monday issued notice to Enforcement Directorate (ED) on former Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren's plea seeking interim relief in a money laundering case.

A bench of justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta listed the matter for the second week of May to hear Soren's plea.

Meanwhile, the apex Court said that the Jharkhand High Court may pronounce the order in Soren's plea challenging his arrest in a money laundering case. Jharkhand High Court has reserved the order on Soren's plea on 28 February but the order is not yet pronounced.

Aggrieved by the High Court for not deciding his plea, Soren moved the top court against it and in the meantime sought interim bail in the matter. On Monday, the apex court while hearing his plea observed the allegations relating to a plot of 8.5 acres. —*ANI*

NOMINATIONS FILED

Clockwise from top left: Union Minister and BJP Amethi candidate Smriti Irani, Defence Minister and BJP Lucknow candidate Rajnath Singh with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, RJD Saran candidate Rohini Acharya with her father and RJD Chief Lalu Prasad Yadav, former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren's wife Kalpana Soren from Gandey constituency, file their papers on Monday PHOTO: PTI

COUPLE GOALS

Wives launch campaign blitz for high-profile leaders in Andhra

AMARAVATI, 29 APRIL

Adding glitz to the election fervour in Andhra Pradesh, spouses of political heavyweights such as Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy and TDP Chief N Chandrababu Naidu have hit the campaign trail for their better halves.

YS Bharathi Reddy, wife of Jagan Mohan Reddy, held a campaign on Sunday in Pulivendula Assembly constituency from where the YSR Congress chief is contesting, while the latter is busy touring the state canvassing for the party's candidates. She went door-to-door, meeting people and discussing issues of the constituency.

"Everyone is with Jagan sir... They expressed confidence that if Jagan promises something he will fulfill it come what may. Jagan always says that Pulivendula is my stronghold," she told media.

Meanwhile, Naidu's wife Bhuvaneswari is set to intensively campaign for her husband from 1 May. According to TDP sources, she filed the former Chief Minister's nomination for Kuppam Assembly segment on his behalf on 19 April. She has already toured several parts of the state under "Nijam Gelavali" (truth should triumph) and reached out to families of "people who died" after hearing the news about Naidu's arrest in September last year in the skill development scam case. She also provided financial assistance to the bereaved families. Following in the footsteps of her mother-in-law, Nara Brahmani, wife of N Lokesh, began canvassing for her husband on 20 April in Mangalagiri, where he unsuccessfully contested in 2019 Assembly polls. Brahmani, Executive Director of family-run Heritage Foods Ltd interacted with some farmers in Bethapudi village in Mangalagiri. She will resume her campaign from today, party sources said. Chandrababu Naidu always worked for women empowerment and it is because of him that the concept of self-help groups assumed significance in the country, she had told reporters. —*PTI*

TDP Chief N Chandrababu Naidu's wife Bhuvaneswari; Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's wife YS Bharathi Reddy PHOTOS: PTI & X/@BHARATHIREDDYYS

Security beefed up at Goa airport over bomb threat mail

PANAJI, 29 APRIL

An email about a bomb at the Dabolim airport in South Goa sent the authorities into a tizzy on Monday, prompting them to increase the security on the premises, a senior official said. Talking to PTI, airport director SVT Dhanamjaya Rao said his office received an email in the morning about a bomb at the airport. "We are taking extra precautions now. While security has been heightened at the airport, the flight operations are unaffected," Rao said. The Goa police received a formal complaint from the airport officials, and the bomb disposal squad was combing the area, a police official said. "We are not leaving any stone unturned. We are working as per the prescribed protocol," he said. *—PTI*

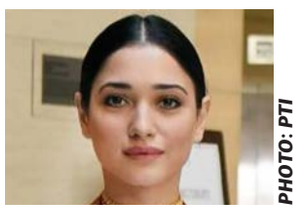


PHOTO: PTI

Tamannaah seeks time to respond to ED summons

MUMBAI,29 APRIl

Amidst the unfolding legal saga surrounding the Mahadev Betting App case, actor Tamannaah Bhatia has requested time from the Maharashtra Cyber department to appear before it due to her absence from Mumbai. The case pertains to the alleged unauthorised broadcasting of the 2023 Indian Premier League (IPL) on the Fairplay app, a subsidiary of Mahadev's online gaming and betting platform. Previously, rapper and singer Badshah faced questioning in connection with the same case. Actor Sanjay Dutt was also summoned but has sought time to appear before authorities. In recent developments, actor Sahil Khan, was arrested on Sunday and remanded to two-day police custody by a Mumbai court starting 29 April.*—PTI*

Landslides block Jammu-Srinagar national highway

JAMMU, 29 APRIL

The Jammu-Srinagar national highway was closed Monday following multiple landslides triggered by rains that lashed wide parts of Jammu and Kashmir overnight, officials said. The highway, the only all-weather road linking Kashmir with rest of the country, was blocked by landslides at Mehar, Gangroo, Mom Passi and Kishtwari Pather in Ramban district. The rains are continuing, hampering restoration works, they said, advising commuters to avoid journey on the highway till it is cleared of the debris. Mughal road, an alternate route linking Poonch and Rajouri in Jammu with south Kashmir's Shopian district, remained closed for third day owing to snowfall in Peer Ki Gali and adjoining areas, the officials said.*—PTI*

Mumbai local train derails at CSMT; services affected

MUMBAI, 29 APRIL

A coach of a local train on the Harbour Line derailed at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (CSMT) here on Monday morning, and no passengers were injured, a spokesperson of the Central Railway said. A trolley from one of the coaches of a CSMT-bound local train from Panvel derailed as it pulled into platform number 2 around 11.35am, the official said.There was no report of injuries to passengers in the affected compartment, he said. The derailment, however, disrupted local train services on the Harbour Line, and the CSMT-bound trains were terminated at Masjid station, the official said. The Harbour Line services will be operational from and to Wadala station, he said, adding that the restoration work is underway and trains on the Main Line will remain unaffected.*—PTI*

Sandeshkhali: SC asks why state protecting individuals

SC's reaction came after govt's plea challenged CBI investigation

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

The Supreme Court on Monday wondered why the West Bengal government has come in as a petitioner before it for "protecting the interest" of some private individuals in the Sandeshkhali matter.

The apex court's observation came when it was hearing the state government's plea challenging the Calcutta High Court's 10 April order which directed a CBI investigation into allegations of crimes against women and land grabbing in Sandeshkhali.

The counsel appearing for the state said it was aggrieved by some comments made in the High Court order.

"There are comments about the state government and that is unfair because the state government has taken full action," the counsel said.

Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, who appeared for the state, said at the outset that the matter may be taken up after a couple of week because they have some very important information which they want to file.

The bench posted the matter for hearing in July.

The bench posted the matter for hearing in July PHOTO: PTI

In its plea before the apex court, the state government has said the high court's order demoralised the entire state machinery, including the police force.

"The High Court in a very generic order directed the State to provide the required support to the CBI without any guidelines, which amounts to usurping the powers of the state police to investigate any cognisable offence in the Sandeshkhali area, even if the same is not related to the allegations levelled by the Public Interest Litigation (PIL) petitioners," the plea said.

The CBI is already investigating the case of attack on the Enforcement Directorate officials in Sandeshkhali and has registered three FIRs related to incidents on 5 January.

Noting that the investigation will be monitored by the court, the High Court had directed the CBI to file a comprehensive report on the alleged illegal conversion of agricultural land into water bodies for pisciculture after conducting a thorough inspection of revenue records and physical inspection of land alleged to have been converted.

The High Court had also directed the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to investigate allegations of crimes against women and land grabbing in Sandeshkhali and submit a comprehensive report to it on the next date of hearing. *—PTI*

- The CBI is already investigating the case of attack on the Enforcement Directorate officials in Sandeshkhali and has registered three FIRs related to incidents on 5 January

SC denies plea seeking abolition of collegium system

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

The Supreme Court on Monday refused to consider listing of a plea seeking abolition of the collegium system of judges appointing judges in the higher judiciary.

A bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra took note of the plea of lawyer Mathews Nedumpara that his writ petition seeking abolition of the collegium system has to be listed for hearing.

"I have mentioned it several times. The registry has rejected it and is not listing my petition," the lawyer said.

PHOTO: PTI

"The Registrar (Listing) has said that once the Constitution bench has ruled on something, an Article 32 petition (under the Article a plea can directly be filed in the Supreme Court on grounds of infringement of fundamental rights) is not maintainable. There are other remedies against the registrar's order," the CJI said.

The review petition against the NJAC judgement was dismissed in the chambers, the lawyers said, adding, "This is about the credibility of the institution. The Collegium system has to go."

"I am sorry," the CJI said.

A five-judge Constitution bench, on 17 October, 2015, had termed as unconstitutional and set aside the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Act and the 99th Constitutional Amendment which had sought to give the politicians and civil society a final say in the appointment of judges to the high courts and the Supreme Court. It had held that the independent judiciary was part of the basic structure of the Constitution.

The plea seeking review of the judgement was also dismissed. *—PTI*

4 convicted, 10 acquitted in hooch tragedy that killed 100

MUMBAI, 28 APRIL

A sessions court on Monday convicted four accused and acquitted 10 others in the 2015 hooch tragedy, in which more than 100 people lost their lives in Mumbai's Malvani area.

Additional sessions judge Swapnil Tawshikar found the accused, Raju Tapkar, Donald Patel, Francis D'mello and Mansoor Khan, guilty of criminal conspiracy, culpable homicide not amounting to murder and other relevant charges under the Indian Penal Code and Bombay Prohibition Act.

The court will hear the prosecution and defence arguments on sentencing on 6 May.

More than 100 people died after consuming spurious liquor in the Lakshmi Nagar slum at Malvani in the western suburb of Malad in June 2015.

The judge, while pronouncing the order, held that "there was a marathon of evidence in the case and then a marathon final arguments".

The tragic incident had caused the death of 106 persons and injuries to around 75, including permanent loss of eyesight, the court noted.

While the prosecution argued that all the accused persons were involved in a criminal conspiracy, the court held that the examination of nearly 240 witnesses did not define a clear chain of evidence.

The prosecution had failed to prove the involvement of all the accused in the criminal conspiracy, it said. *—PTI*

IN CHHATTISGARH

Sukma: Naxalite killed after gun fight with security personnel

RAIPUR, 29 APRIL

A Naxalite was killed in an encounter with security personnel in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district on Monday morning, police said.

The gunfight took place in a forest under Kistaram police station area when separate teams of the District Reserve Guard (DRG) and Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA- an elite unit of CRPF) were out on an anti-Naxal operation, Sukma Superintendent of Police Kiran G Chavan told PTI.

The exchange of fire took place between Naxalites and the DRG team in the forest, located around 450km from the state capital Raipur, he said.

Security personnel during an encounter with Naxalites PHOTO: PTI

After the gunfight stopped, the body of a Naxalite and a weapon were recovered from the spot, the SP said, adding that search operation was still underway in the area.

With this incident, 81 Naxalites have been killed so far this year in separate encounters in Bastar region, comprising seven districts including Sukma, according to police. On 16 April, 29 Naxalites were gunned down in an encounter with security forces in the region's Kanker district. *—PTI*

Inter-state drug racket: 6 more held

JODHPUR, 29 APRIL

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) and ATS have arrested six more people in Rajasthan in connection with an interstate drug racket and unearthed a fourth manufacturing lab in Sirohi district with the seizure of narcotics worth Rs 45 crore, officials said on Monday.

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) and Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS), after about three months of "intensive" technical and ground surveillance, had on 27 April busted three "clandestine" drug manufacturing labs in Rajasthan and Gujarat leading to the seizure of 300 kg of narcotics and arrest of seven people, according to NCB Deputy Director General (Operations) Gyaneshwar Singh.

A total of 149kgs of mephedrone or 'meow meow' drug (both in powder and liquid form), 50kg ephedrine, and 200 litres of acetone was recovered from the three labs located in Bhinmal of Jalore district and Osian in Jodhpur district of Rajasthan and Gandhinagar in Gujarat, the officer said.

On Sunday, six drug dealers, including the mastermind of the Rajasthan network, who were part of the same network were arrested. *—PTI*

SC JUNKS PLEA ON POSTPONEMENT OF CA EXAMS, TEST IN MAY

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

The Supreme Court on Monday refused to entertain a plea seeking postponement of certain papers of the Chartered Accountancy (CA) exams scheduled for May on account of the Lok Sabha polls.

A bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra said the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India has not fixed the examination on election dates.

It noted that the general elections to the Lok Sabha are to be held on 7 and 13 May and no exam has been scheduled for 6 and 12 May. The Chartered Accountancy exams will start from 2 May till 17 May. *—PTI*

'KALLAKKADAL PHENOMENON'

Swelling seas threaten Kerala & TN

T'PURAM, 29 APRIL

The entire coastal areas of Kerala and the southern coastal parts of Tamil Nadu are likely to experience the "kallakkadal phenomenon" -- the sudden swell of the seas causing rough waves -- until 11.30pm on Monday, prompting a central agency to issue alerts to fishermen and coastal residents.

"As the rough seas are likely to intensify, stay away from the danger zone areas as per the instructions of the authorities," according to the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS).

INCOIS, the agency that issues weather warnings for fishermen in the country, advised people to safely moor fishing vessels in the harbour.

'Kallakkadal phenomenon' the sudden swell of the seas causing rough waves until 11.30pm on Monday PHOTO: PTI

"Keeping a safe distance between boats can avoid the risk of collision. The safety of fishing equipment should be ensured," it said in a statement here.

INCOIS also advised people to avoid trips to the beach and activities at sea completely.

The term 'kallakkadal' literally means a sea which comes suddenly like a thief.

INCOIS has said that the swell surge is the result of strong winds in the southern part of the Indian Ocean at certain times occurring suddenly without any particular indications or warning, hence the name "kallakkadal." *—PTI*

- INCOIS, the agency that issues weather warnings for fishermen in the country, advised people to safely moor fishing vessels in the harbour

BACK ON TRACK

Business establishments reopen after three-day shutdown in Nagaland PHOTO: PTI

Nagaland shops reopens after three days

KOHIMA, 29 APRIL

Business establishments in Nagaland reopened on Monday after three days in the wake of a shutdown call by an industry body to protest against "unabated extortion" by underground groups, officials said.

Shops and other commercial establishments reopened for varying periods, as industry bodies supporting the shutdown in the northeastern state announced different relaxation timings on Monday.

The shutdown was first observed in the state's commercial capital Dimapur on Friday, following which other districts joined the call given by the Confederation of Nagaland Chamber of Commerce & Industries (CNCCI).

The CNCCI had urged the state government to take immediate steps to stop the "unabated extortions, intimidations and summons" by the underground groups.

It has announced a relaxation period from 12 noon to 6pm on Monday, while the timings given by other business bodies in the districts vary, the officials said.

In some districts, the relaxation period is from 6am to 6pm, they said.

Traffic snarls were reported from many places in the state as people rushed to stock essential commodities.

Meanwhile, the Nagaland Police has come up with an app, urging the business community and the public to report cases of extortion and drug trafficking, the officials added. *—PTI*

- Traffic snarls were reported from many places in the state as people rushed to stock essential commodities. Meanwhile, the Nagaland Police has come up with an app, urging the business community and the public to report cases of extortion and drug trafficking, the officials added

9 KILLED, 23 INJURED AS VEHICLES COLLIDE

PATNA, 21 APRIL

Six women and three children were killed and 23 people injured when a goods vehicle they were travelling in collided with a truck in Chhattisgarh's Bemetara district, police said on Monday.

The accident took place late Sunday night near Kathia village when the victims, natives of Patharra village, were returning after attending a family function in Tiraiyya village, a senior police official said.

The goods pick-up vehicle collided with the mini truck that was parked by the roadside, the official said.

Eight people identified as Bhuri Nishad,50, Neera Sahu,55, Geeta Sahu,60, Agniya Sahu,60, Khushbu Sahu,39, Madhu Sahu,5, Rikesh Nishad,6, and Twinkle Nishad,6, were killed on the spot while one of the injured, Ratna Sahu,50, died while being shifted to Raipur for advanced treatment, he said. Three of the critically injured persons are admitted in All India Institute of Medical Sciences Raipur and a fourth in another hospital, he said. *—PTI*

- The goods pick-up vehicle collided with the mini truck that was parked by the roadside

WB NIT student kills self, students blame authorities

DURGAPUR, 29 APRIL

A large number of students of the National Institute of Technology, Durgapur held protests in the college premises demanding resignation of the NIT Durgapur director over death of a second year mechanical engineering student.

Arpan Ghosh, a Student of the National Institute of Technology, Durgapur was found hanging inside his hostel room on Sunday afternoon.

Director of the institute, Arvind Choubey informed that it is a case of suicide and the police is conducting an investigation upon it.

Uproar erupted among fellow students, accusing the institution of academic pressure and neglect. A mega chaos erupted in the institute premises when large number of students gathered and raised slogans against the institution.

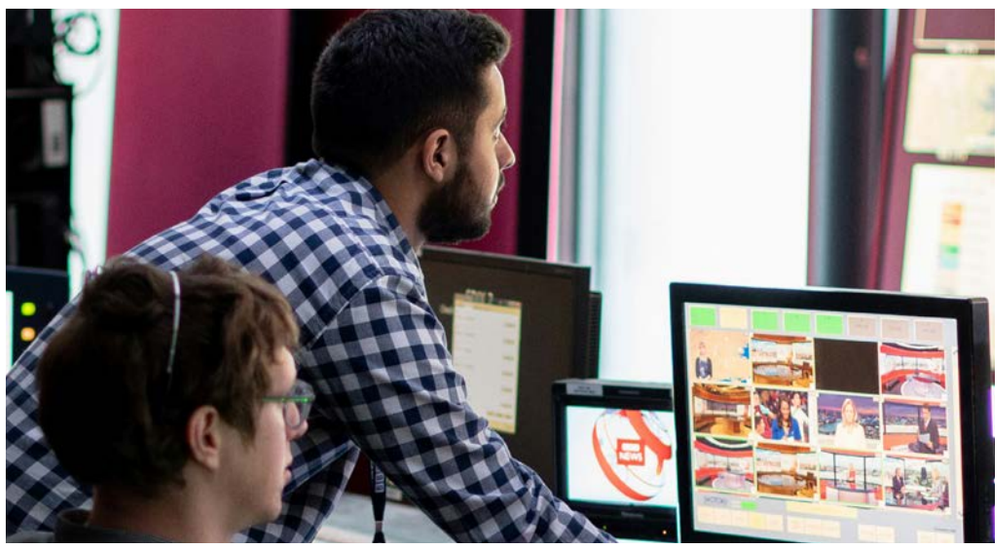
PHOTO: PTI

Students allege that they have been deprived of adequate study time and are subjected to consecutive examinations without respite, leading to extreme stress. Furthermore, students complain of inadequate medical facilities on campus, including the absence of an ambulance. *—ANI*

BULLOCK CART RACE

Participants during a State-level bullock cart race, at Thegur, in Chikkamagaluru district, Monday
PHOTO: PTI

Jobless engineers are army of election consultancies



These jobless graduates are considered to be valuable resource for political consultancies ***PHOTO: UNSPLASH***

How many tennis balls can fit in a passenger plane?

Neeraj, a young economics graduate from the premier Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), was given 15 minutes to solve this question during his interview rounds at Nation With Namo (NwN), one of the in-house political consultancies of BJP.

He got the calculation right and joined a small team of graduates from India's top universities who were dispatched to the eastern state of Tripura to conduct surveys, collect and analyse voter data for elections that were due in February last year.

Their job was to identify who was not voting for BJP, separate them into demographic cohorts – age, gender, caste, tribe, religion – find a common concern, issue or fear and strategise how to exploit that in BJP's favour. And they were to do all this while staying under the radar.

"All of us who go through the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) are good at solving problems," said Neeraj, who asked for his name to be changed as he is not authorised to speak to the media.

Admission to most of India's top government-funded engineering, law and management colleges is through all-India exams. Millions of students take these exams, including the JEE for admission to 23 IITs, but only 2-3 percent make it to the premier institutes.

Neeraj is one of few who made it, and is now in the league of hundreds of graduates from India's top engineering and business schools who have in recent years joined political campaigns, usually for short stints while they wait for corporate job offers.

The ability of these graduates – readily available – to manage and analyse enormous amounts of voter data makes them a valuable resource for political consultancies. The latter's market size, estimated to be about $300m, is set to grow with individual candidates and national and regional parties looking for their expertise.

In the small state of Tripura, where BJP was seeking re-election, voter data culled and analysed by Neeraj and others in the NwN team showed that the party was in a comfortable position in the north. But in Amarpur constituency, home to a few tribal areas including Chabimura, voters were leaning towards other parties.

For centuries, members of the Jamatia tribe, who speak Kokborok, a Tibetian-Burmese language, have lived in this remote, rain-fed area known as the "Amazon of Tripura".

In Chabimura, Neeraj's field survey found a cohort and a solution. There were a few dominant Jamatia families, and impressing them, he figured, would have a trickle-down effect on tribal voters in the area.

Months before India began the gargantuan, 44-day exercise of conducting national general elections from 19 April, armies of tech-savvy IITians, MBAs, lawyers and researchers have been busy collating, studying and analysing voter data to decide on campaign strategy, issues to highlight, where to deliver gifts and polarising speeches while pushing a glut of fake news on social media and WhatsApp aiming to convince voters for their clients.

'Extremely opaque influence operations'

In Telangana, Rajesh, an engineer from IIT who asked for his name to be changed so he could speak freely, is in charge of a 12-member data team at Inclusive Minds, a leading political consultancy that works exclusively with Congress . His life these days is governed by data – it's flooding his head and the computers in his office and those of the many political consultancies that have mushroomed.

Hundreds of field associates spread across the country send Rajesh and his team reams of voters' demographic details along with the names of their favourite candidates and the main issues that resonate with them. This is topped up with data from ongoing telephone surveys and ads.

Someone in Rajesh's team also scans news and social media to figure out the impact of every political statement, rally, road show, speech, and party manifesto.

Young, cheap talent

Set up in the 1950s and 1960s in a newly independent India, IITs and IIMs were meant to power the building of a modern, self-sufficient, industrialised nation. As India's economy changed, so did these institutions. They grew in numbers, courses were added, innovation was encouraged and start-up incubation centres were set up.

In India's depressed job market, where the unemployment rate for graduates is nine times higher than the unemployment rate of uneducated youth, professional, corporate-style political consultancies began recruiting directly from IITs and other campuses about five or six years ago and now, it's an annual affair.

Secretive

Measure and track are the two mantras to win elections, said former political strategist Bharti.

Neeraj no longer works for a political consultancy. But Mohan bubbles with excitement when he talks about the money that flows in elections that can be used to buy votes and opponents or hand contracts to cronies for all things election-related, including organising events and printing posters.

For now, he is waiting for a shift – when the power to run election campaigns moves from politicians to political consultancies. *—Al Jazeera*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

Studies examine effects of climate change on deserts

Warming of Arctic is reducing dust levels ***PHOTO: UNSPLASH***

Warming of the Arctic is reducing dust levels around the world by changing the way winds blow over deserts, thereby affecting how the dust is transported, according to a new research.

Researchers explained that driven by human-induced climate change, the Arctic region is warming at a rate faster than the rest of the world - known as Arctic amplification.

This process changes the routes of storms and patterns of winds over major sources of dust in West and South Asia namely the Arabian Peninsula and the Thar Desert between India and Pakistan, they said.

The previous studies have documented reducing dust levels across India, particularly northern India, the Persian Gulf Coast and much of the Middle East.

The latest findings implied that increase in greenhouse gas emissions coming from human activities have reduced dust levels, said the researchers, led by Harvard University.

Ironically, this meant that as humans pursue net-zero emissions, winds could likely return to blowing the same way in these regions as they did pre-warming, they said.

Therefore, alongside of emissions mitigation worldwide, the researchers called for anti-desertification measures by the local governments to keep the dust levels in check.

"At the local level, we need to be thinking about stronger anti-desertification actions such as reforestation and irrigation management and how to better monitor urban-level dust concentrations in concert with broad climate mitigation strategies," said Michael B. McElroy, a professor at Harvard University, US, and lead author of the study published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

- A study, also published in the journal Earth's Future in 2023, predicted the Thar Desert to turn green before the turn of this century

Another study by the researchers at the Chinese Academy of Sciences charted trends in the expansion and shrinking of oases around the world. The findings are published in the journal Earth's Future.

They found that globally, oases grew by more than 2.2 lakh square kilometres from 1995 to 2020, driven mostly due to intentional oasis expansion projects in Asia.

The researchers also found, however, that desertification drove the loss of more than 1.34 lakh square kilometres of oasis over the same period, also mostly in Asia, leading to a net growth of 86,500 square kilometres over the study period.

They used satellite data to look for green, vegetated areas within dryland areas, indicating an oasis, and analysed changes.

The authors said that most of the growth in oases were from the artificial expansion of oases, which may not be sustainable in the future. They called for improving water resource management, promoting sustainable land use and encouraging water conservation.

A study, also published in the journal Earth's Future in 2023, predicted the Thar Desert to turn green before the turn of this century. *—PTI*

Arctic region is warming at a rate faster than the rest of the world ***PHOTO: UNSPLASH***

Study identifies the role of genetics in depression

Depression is a large family of illness with different causes and mechanisms ***PHOTO: UNSPLASH***

The core experiences of depression – changes in energy, activity, thinking and mood – have been described for more than 10,000 years. The word "depression" has been used for about 350 years.

Given this long history, it may surprise you that experts don't agree about what depression is, how to define it or what causes it.

But many experts do agree that depression is not one thing. It's a large family of illnesses with different causes and mechanisms. This makes choosing the best treatment for each person challenging.

Reactive vs endogenous depression

One strategy is to search for sub-types of depression and see whether they might do better with different kinds of treatments. One example is contrasting "reactive" depression with "endogenous" depression.

Reactive depression (also thought of as social or psychological depression) is presented as being triggered by exposure to stressful life events. These might be being assaulted or losing a loved one – an understandable reaction to an outside trigger.

Endogenous depression (also thought of as biological or genetic depression) is proposed to be caused by something inside, such as genes or brain chemistry.

Many people working clinically in mental health accept this sub-typing. You might have read about this online. But we think this approach is way too simple.

While stressful life events and genes may, individually, contribute to causing depression, they also interact to increase the risk of someone developing depression. And evidence shows that there is a genetic component to being exposed to stressors. Some genes affect things such as personality. Some affect how we interact with our environments.

What we did and what we found

Our team set out to look at the role of genes and stressors to see if classifying depression as reactive or endogenous was valid.

In the Australian Genetics of Depression Study, people with depression answered surveys about exposure to stressful life events. We analysed DNA from their saliva samples to calculate their genetic risk for mental disorders.

Our question was simple. Does genetic risk for depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, ADHD, anxiety and neuroticism (a personality trait) influence people's reported exposure to stressful life events?

We looked at the genetic risk of conditions other than depression for a couple of reasons. First, genetic variants linked to depression overlap with those linked to other mental disorders. Second, two people with depression may have completely different genetic variants. So we wanted to cast a wide net to look at a wider spectrum of genetic variants linked to mental disorders.

If reactive and endogenous depression sub-types are valid, we'd expect people with a lower genetic component to their depression (the reactive group) would report more stressful life events. And we'd expect those with a higher genetic component (the endogenous group) would report fewer stressful life events. But after studying more than 14,000 people with depression we found the opposite.

We found people at higher genetic risk for depression, anxiety, ADHD or schizophrenia say they've been exposed to more stressors.

Assault with a weapon, sexual assault, accidents, legal and financial troubles, and childhood abuse and neglect, were all more common in people with a higher genetic risk of depression, anxiety, ADHD or schizophrenia.

These associations were not strongly influenced by people's age, sex or relationships with family. We didn't look at other factors that may influence these associations, such as socioeconomic status. We also relied on people's memory of past events, which may not be accurate.

How do genes play a role?

Genetic risk for mental disorders changes people's sensitivity to the environment.

Imagine two people, one with a high genetic risk for depression, one with a low risk. They both lose their jobs. The genetically vulnerable person experiences the job loss as a threat to their self-worth and social status. There is a sense of shame and despair. They can't bring themselves to look for another job for fear of losing it too. For the other, the job loss feels less about them and more about the company. These two people internalise the event differently and remember it differently.

Genetic risk for mental disorders also might make it more likely people find themselves in environments where bad things happen. For example, a higher genetic risk for depression might affect self-worth, making people more likely to get into dysfunctional relationships which then go badly.

What does our study mean for depression?

First, it confirms genes and environments are not independent. Genes influence the environments we end up in, and what then happens. Genes also influence how we react to those events.

Second, our study doesn't support a distinction between reactive and endogenous depression. Genes and environments have a complex interplay. Most cases of depression are a mix of genetics, biology and stressors.

Third, people with depression who appear to have a stronger genetic component to their depression report their lives are punctuated by more serious stressors.

So clinically, people with higher genetic vulnerability might benefit from learning specific techniques to manage their stress. This might help some people reduce their chance of developing depression in the first place. It might also help some people with depression reduce their ongoing exposure to stressors.

—The Conversation

PHOTO: X/ @SANCHEZCASTEJON

Spain's PM will not quit over allegations against wife

MADRID, 29 APRIL

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said on Monday he will continue in office "even with more strength" after days of reflection. Sanchez shocked the country on Wednesday, announcing he was taking five days off to think about his future after a court opened preliminary proceedings against his wife on corruption allegations. The legal complaint against his wife, Begona Gomez, was filed by a far-Right legal platform that says Gomez used her position to influence business deals. The group, Manos Limpias, or "Clean Hands", acknowledged that the complaint was based on newspaper articles. Spanish prosecutors say it should be thrown out. Sanchez said the move was personal attack on his family and he needed time to decide on priorities. *—PTI*

9 going on trial over far-Right German coup plot

BERLIN, 29 APRIL

Nine people charged in an alleged far-Right plot to topple the German government are going on trial on Monday in one of three cases linked to the purported conspiracy, which came to light in late 2022. The trial opening in Stuttgart is the first one and is focused on those defendants of the so-called Reich Citizens group who allegedly were part of the so-called military arm, German news agency dpa reported. Federal prosecutors in December filed terrorism charges against 27 people. Nine other suspects, among them a self-styled prince and a former far-right lawmaker, will go on trial on 21 May at Frankfurt court. The other eight will go on trial in Munich on 18 June. The case includes Heinrich XIII Prince Reuss, whom the group planned to install as provisional new leader.*—AP*

5 killed after tornadoes strike central US states

OKLAHOMA, 29 APRIL

At least five people, including a four-month-old baby, have been killed after dozens of tornadoes ripped through the central US causing serious damage. Tens of thousands of residents were left without power following separate storms that began on Friday. Four of the deaths happened in Oklahoma, where a state of emergency has been declared in a dozen counties. A fifth person died from their injuries in Iowa after a separate storm system hit the Midwest, local media reported. The National Weather Service (NWS) said a preliminary investigation had confirmed some of Saturday's tornadoes had gusts of above 218km an hour. *—AP*

3 cops wounded by gunfire in Orleans; suspect killed

KENNER, 29 APRIL

Three Louisiana police officers were wounded by gunfire on Sunday in a standoff with a man who was later killed by a police sharpshooter, authorities and news reports said. Sheriff Joseph Lopinto said a sniper from the Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office shot and killed the suspect at a house in Kenner where he had held off police and fired shots at law enforcement authorities after shooting three officers who tried to enter the home, WGNO-TV reported. The injured officers were taken to a hospital after being shot Sunday morning in Kenner, about 25 km west of New Orleans, Kenner Police Chief Keith Conley said. The man was wanted in a shooting earlier Sunday in which two people were wounded, Kenner police spokesman Captian Michael Cunningham said. *—AP*

40 die after Kenya dam collapses

100 killed in rains that have caused flooding

NAIROBI, 29 APRIL

A dam collapsed in western Kenya early on Monday, killing at least 40 people after a wall of water swept through houses and cut off a major road, police said.

The Old Kijabe Dam, located in the Mai Mahiu area of the Great Rift Valley region that is prone to flash floods, collapsed and water spilled downstream, police official Stephen Kirui told The Associated Press.

Ongoing rains in Kenya have caused flooding that has already killed nearly 100 people and caused the opening of schools to be postponed.

All schools were set to reopen on Monday but will now open on May 6.

Ninety-three people have died in the flooding in Kenya and that number is expected to rise after a boat capsized in the northern Garissa county on Sunday night. The Kenyan Red Cross said it had rescued 23 people from the boat, but more than a dozen people were still missing.

A family uses a boat after fleeing floodwaters that wreaked havoc in the Githurai area of Nairobi, Kenya, on Monday *PHOTO: AP*

Heavy rains have been pounding the country since mid-March and the Meteorology Department has warned of more rainfall. The highest number of deaths in Kenya have been reported in the capital, Nairobi, according to police records. The East African region is experiencing flooding due to the heavy rains, and 155 people have reportedly died in Tanzania while more than 200,000 people are affected in neighbouring Burundi.

Kenya's main airport was flooded on Saturday, forcing some flights to be diverted, as videos of a flooded runway, terminals and cargo section were shared online.

More than 200,000 people across Kenya the country have been affected by the floods, with houses in flood-prone areas submerged and people seeking refuge in schools.

—AP

'Dar made Pak Deputy PM to compensate Nawaz'

ISLAMABAD, 29 APRIL

The surprise elevation of Pakistan Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar — a close confidant of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif — as the deputy prime minister was in reality "pre-planned. It is reportedly a move to "compensate" the PML-N Supremo for the loss of the finance portfolio, it emerged on Monday.

Dar, 73, a chartered accountant and a veteran politician from the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party, was appointed as Deputy Prime Minister by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday "with immediate effect and until further orders".

Shehbaz and Dar are currently in Saudi Arabia for the World Economic Forum's (WEF) special meeting.

According to the Dawn newspaper, Dar's new appointment "took many by surprise, but

Nawaz Sharif *PHOTO: PTI*

drew hardly any criticism from its allies".

Dar being "awarded" the "rarely filled" slot of deputy prime minister has raised many questions, the report said. The move was also seen in the context of Nawaz taking over the reins of the ruling PML-N party as its president, a position he had lost following his conviction in the Panama Papers case, the report said. Dar is considered close to Nawaz due to matrimonial links between the two families, as his son is the son-in-law of the elder Sharif. *—PTI*

Pak PM talks new loan scheme with IMF in Riyadh

ISLAMABAD, 29 APRIL

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has met IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva and discussed a new loan programme for the cash-strapped country to put the economy back on track.

In a meeting on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum (WEF) Special Meeting in Riyadh, the premier thanked Georgieva, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director, for her support to Pakistan in securing the USD 3 billion standby arrangement (SBA) from IMF last year that was now nearing its completion. Pakistan secured the USD 3 billion IMF programme in June last year, which helped it avert a sovereign default. Pakistan is seeking a new long-term Extended Fund Facility (EFF). *—AP*

TABLES TURNED

Putin likely didn't order Navalny's death, says US

WASHINGTON, 29 APRIL

US intelligence officials have determined that Russian President Vladimir Putin likely didn't order the death of imprisoned Opposition leader Alexei Navalny, according to an official familiar with the determination.

While US officials believe Putin was ultimately responsible for the death of Navalny, who endured brutal conditions during his confinement, the intelligence community has found "no smoking gun" that Putin was aware of the timing of Navalny's death — which came soon before the Russian president's re-election — or directly ordered it, according to the official.

The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter.

Soon after the Navalny's death, US President Joe Biden said Putin was ultimately responsible but did not accuse the Russian president of directly ordering it.

At the time, Biden said the US did not know exactly what had happened to Navalny but that "there is no doubt" that his death "was the consequence of something that Putin and his thugs did."

Navalny, 47, Russia's best-known opposition politician and Putin's most persistent foe, died Feb. 16 in a remote penal colony above the Arctic Circle while serving a 19-year sentence on extremism charges that he rejected as politically motivated. He had been behind bars since January 2021 after returning to Russia from Germany, where he had been recovering from nerve-agent poisoning that he blamed on the Kremlin.

Russian officials have said only that Navalny died of natural causes and have vehemently denied involvement both in the poisoning and in his death. *—AP*

The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter *PHOTO: AP*

2 SCRIBES JAILED FOR WORKING WITH NAVALNY

LONDON, 29 APRIL

Two Russian journalists were arrested by their government on "extremism" charges and ordered by courts there on Saturday to remain in custody pending investigation and trial on accusations of working for a group founded by the late Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny.

Konstantin Gabov and Sergey Karelin both denied the charges for which they will be detained for a minimum of two months before any trials begin. Each faces a minimum of two years in prison and a maximum of six years for alleged "participation in an extremist organisation", according to Russian courts.

They are just the latest journalists arrested amid a Russian government crackdown on dissent and independent media that intensified after its full-scale invasion of Ukraine more than two years ago.A journalist for the Russian edition of Forbes magazine, Sergei Mingazov, was detained on charges of spreading false information about the Russian military, his lawyer said on Friday.

—PTI

Attack on checkpoint leaves 2 cops, 5 gunmen dead

Moscow, 29 April

A group of militants attacked a police checkpoint in Russia's North Caucasus region, killing two officers, officials said Monday. Four other officers were wounded and all five attackers were killed in the shootout in the Karachay-Cherkessia region late Sunday, according to the regional branch of Russia's Interior Ministry. The Investigative Committee, the country's top state criminal investigation agency, said the same gunmen had raided another police checkpoint in the region a week before, killing two police and injuring another. It didn't describe the attackers' affiliation or motive. While Chechnya has stabilised under the rule of Moscow-backed leader Ramzan Kadyrov after two separatist wars, violence linked to Islamist groups has occasionally erupted in other parts of Russia's volatile North Caucasus.

Iran unveils new suicide drone in wake of sanctions

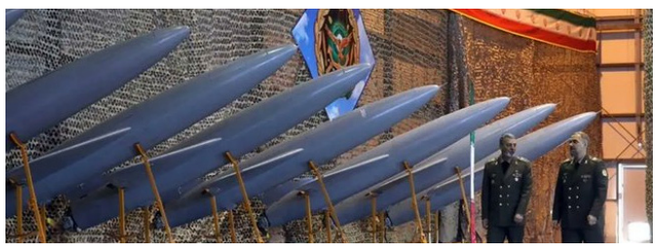
TEHRAN, 29 APRIL

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard has unveiled a new suicide drone, engineered to fly into targets and detonate upon impact, similar to those employed by Russia in the Ukrainian conflict.

The announcement was made through the IRGC-linked Tasnim news agency, which also released a video showcasing the yet-to-be-named drone, drawing comparisons to Russia's Zala Lancet model first produced in 2020.

The new drone reportedly resembles the Lancet in its capabilities, expected to have a flight endurance between 30 to 60 minutes, carry a payload of 3 to 6kg, and achieve a range of up to 40 km.

Iran's history with drone technology has been marked by its extensive provision of Shahed-type drones to Russia, which have been deployed against civilian targets and residential areas in Ukraine,



Iran's history with drone technology has been marked by its extensive provision of Shahed-type drones to Russia *PHOTO: X/@NEWSNETWORKS*

which has led to global sanctions on the regime. Furthermore, Iran's recent actions include an unprecedented assault on Israel using 350 missiles and suicide drones, although they were successfully intercepted by Israel and a US-led coalition.

Additionally, drones supplied to Iranian proxy groups in Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon have repeatedly targeted US forces, Israeli territories, and maritime assets in strategic waters, inflicting damage and escalating regional tensions.

The deployment of the new drone technology occurs in the wake of new sanctions imposed by the European Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States, aimed at curtailing Iran's missile and drone production capabilities.

In response, Nasser Kanaani, a spokesman for the Iranian foreign ministry, criticized the sanctions, asserting that they would not impede the ongoing development of Iran's drone industry.

—Courtesy, Iran International

Blinken in Saudi to push for Gaza ceasefire & aid

RIYADH, 29 APRIL

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Monday that Israel must still do more to increase the flow of humanitarian aid into the besieged Gaza Strip. Blinken said he would use his current Middle East trip — his seventh to the region since the Israel-Hamas war started in October — to press that case with Israeli leaders.

Speaking to Gulf Cooperation Council foreign ministers in Riyadh, Blinken said best way to ease the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza would be to conclude an elusive ceasefire agreement that would release hostages held by Hamas. But, in the meantime, he said it was critical to improve conditions now.

"The most effective way to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, to alleviate the suffering of children, women and men, and to create space for a more just and durable solution is to get a ceasefire and the hostages out," he said.

"But we're also not waiting on a cease-fire to take the necessary steps to meet the needs of civilians in Gaza," Blinken said. He said that because President Joe Biden has been insisting that Israel do more, including in his phone call with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday, there had been improvements, although not nearly enough.

—PTI

HOUTHIS TARGET ANOTHER VESSEL IN RED SEA

JERUSALEM, 29 APR

A suspected attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels targeted a vessel in the Red Sea on Monday, authorities said, the latest assault in their campaign against international shipping in the crucial maritime route.

The attack happened off the coast of Mokha, Yemen, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said, without offering any other immediate details.It urged vessels to exercise caution in the area. The Houthis did not immediately acknowledge any attack there.

The Houthis say their attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden are aimed at pressuring Israel to end its assault in Gaza, which has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians there. *—PTI*

S Korea's Prez meets Oppn leader to reset presidency

SEOUL, 29 APRIL

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol was talking with liberal Opposition leader Lee Jae-myung on Monday about how to revive bipartisan cooperation, after Yoon's conservative party recently suffered a massive defeat in parliamentary elections.

The meeting was their first since Yoon took office in 2022 after defeating Lee in the country's closest presidential election. During their campaigns, Yoon, Lee and their supporters demonized each other and filed dozens of lawsuits against each other.

Yoon proposed the meeting as he faces growing calls to cooperate with Lee's Democratic Party, whose win in the 10 April parliamentary elections allows it to extend its control of the single-chamber National Assembly until after Yoon's single five-year term ends in 2027.

Yoon and Lee were meeting without a set agenda. Officials

Yoon Suk Yeol *PHOTO: X/@PRESIDENT_KR*

at Yoon's presidential office and Lee's party earlier said the meeting would focus on how to improve public livelihoods and promote cooperation on state affairs.

They also are expected to discuss how to end the weekslong strikes by thousands of junior doctors, which have been blamed for delayed surgeries and medical treatments and other burdens on medical services.

Some observers say Lee may raise his party's demands that Yoon's government must accept special investigations into allegations involving his wife and top officials.

—AP

AHEAD OF GRADUATIONS

No end to Gaza protests in US varsities

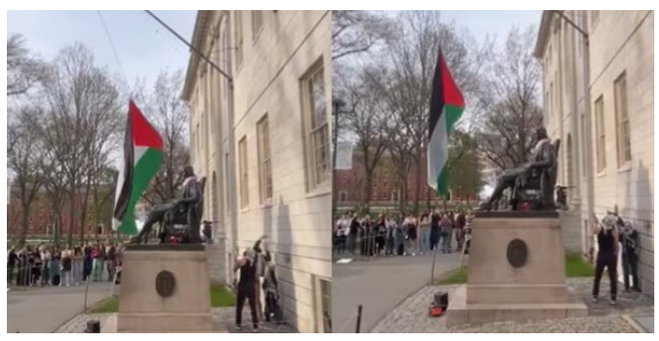
LOS ANGELES, 29 APRIL

Protests are roiling college campuses across the US as upcoming graduation ceremonies are threatened by disruptive demonstrators, with students and others sparring over Israel's military offensive in Gaza and its mounting death toll.

Many campuses were largely quiet over the weekend as demonstrators stayed by tents erected as protest headquarters, although a few colleges saw forced removals and arrests.

Many students are demanding their universities cut financial ties with Israel over the large-scale operation in Gaza it says was launched to stamp out the militant Palestinian group Hamas.

Protesters on both sides of the rancourous debate shouted and shoved each other during duelling demonstrations Sunday at the University of California, Los Angeles.



Student protesters raise Palestinian flags at Harvard Yard, sparking campus controversy *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

The university stepped up security after "some physical altercations broke out among demonstrators", Mary Osako, vice chancellor for UCLA Strategic Communications, said in a statement. There were no reports of arrests or injuries.

About 275 people were arrested on Saturday at various campuses including Indiana University at Bloomington, Arizona State University and Washington University in St. Louis. The number of arrests nationwide approached 900 since New York police removed a pro-Palestinian protest encampment at Columbia University and arrested more than 100 demonstrators on April 18.

The plight of students who have been arrested has become a central part of protests, with the students and a growing number of faculty demanding amnesty for protesters. At issue is whether the suspensions and legal records will follow students through their adult lives.

Faculty members at universities in California, Georgia and Texas have initiated or passed largely symbolic votes of no confidence in their leadership. White House national security spokesman John Kirby said President Joe Biden "knows that there are very strong feelings" but would leave managing the protests to local authorities.

"People should have the ability to air their views and to share their perspectives publicly but it has to be peaceful," Kirby said on ABC's "This Week." Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, in an interview that aired on Sunday, called it "a dangerous situation" and placed the responsibility with college administrators. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Rupee declines to settle at 83.48 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 29 APRIL

The rupee declined 10 paise to close at 83.48 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, as investors remained cautious ahead of the US Federal Reserve's monetary policy decision. A robust sentiment in the domestic equity market and softening crude prices in the international market, however, cushioned the downfall in the Indian currency, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened weak at 83.39 and touched the intra-day low of 83.51 against the greenback during the session. The domestic currency finally settled at 83.48 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a loss of 10 paise compared to its previous closing level. On Friday, the rupee had declined 10 paise to close at 83.38 against the US dollar. *—PTI*

Gold drops Rs 130; silver remains flat

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

Gold prices dropped Rs 130 to Rs 72,750 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday in line with weak trends in the overseas markets, according to HDFC Securities.

The precious metal had closed at Rs 72,880 per 10 grams in the previous session.

However, silver prices remained flat at Rs 84,500 per kg.

"Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 72,750 per 10 grams, down by Rs 130 against the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,333 per ounce, down by USD 5 from the previous close. However, silver was marginally up at USD 27.22 per ounce. *—PTI*

Tata Motors allies with South Indian Bank

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

Tata Motors on Monday said it has tied up with South Indian Bank to offer financing solutions to its commercial vehicle customers and dealerships. As part of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), South Indian Bank will offer financing solutions across the auto major's entire commercial vehicle portfolio, Tata Motors said in a statement. Tata Motors sells an extensive range of sub 1-tonne to 55-tonne cargo vehicles and 10-seater to 51-seater mass mobility solutions, ranging in small commercial vehicles and pickups, trucks and buses. "Our collaboration with Tata Motors enables us to deliver seamless vehicle financing solutions to commercial vehicle dealers and customers," South Indian Bank MD & CEO PR Seshadri said. *—PTI*

Russia's business chamber opens 2nd office in India

MUMBAI, 29 APRIL

Russia's largest trade body, Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) of the Russian Federation, has opened its second office in India in Mumbai to grow bilateral trade and investment in new sectors. World Trade Center Mumbai and All India Association of Industries (AIAI) organized an interactive meeting with a high-level business delegation led by Sergey Katyrin, President, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) of the Russian Federation. Bilateral goods trade has crossed the USD 50 billion mark this year and I am confident that in the next three years, we can surpass USD 100 billion trade. *—ANI*

After SEBI's directive, BSE shares tank nearly 19 pc

SEBI asked BSE to pay fee based on notional value of contracts

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

Shares of BSE tanked nearly 19 per cent on Monday as the exchange is expected to shell out more regulatory fee after markets watchdog Sebi asked it to pay the fee based on the "notional value" of its options contracts rather than on the premium value. The stock plummeted 18.63 per cent to Rs 2,612.10 on the NSE.

About 103.10 lakh shares of the exchange were traded on the NSE in intra-day trade.

In the broader market, the NSE Nifty traded with a gain of 205.10 points or 0.91 per cent to 22,626.65.

Notional turnover represents the overall strike price of all contracts traded in derivatives, whereas premium turnover is the sum of premiums paid on all contracts traded. As the notional value exceeds the premium turnover, opting for notional turnover as the basis entails a higher fee outlay.

In a disclosure on Sunday, BSE said it is currently evaluating the validity of the claim as per Sebi communication.

In case it is ascertained that the said amount is payable, the total differential Sebi regulatory fees for the period from FY 2006-07 to FY 2022-23 would be Rs 68.64 crore plus GST, which includes an interest of Rs 30.34 crore. Further, the differential Sebi regulatory fees for FY 2023-24, if liable, could be around Rs 96.30 crore plus GST, BSE said.

About 103.10 lakh shares of the exchange were traded on the NSE in intra-day trade *PHOTO: ANI*

- Notional turnover represents the overall strike price of all contracts traded in derivatives, whereas premium turnover is the sum of premiums paid on all contracts traded

Market bounces back, Sensex jumps over 900 points

Benchmark BSE Sensex rebounded sharply by 941 points while NSE Nifty closed above the 22,600 level on Monday on the back of buying in banking and infra shares and a global stocks rally.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 941.12 points or 1.28 per cent to settle at 74,671.28. During the day, it zoomed 990.99 points or 1.34 per cent to 74,721.15. The NSE Nifty went up by 223.45 points or 1 per cent to 22,643.40.

From the Sensex basket, ICICI Bank climbed nearly 5 per cent after the company on Saturday said its March quarter consolidated net profit grew 18.5 per cent to Rs 11,672 crore, helped by lower provisions. *—PTI*

20 mineral blocks to be put on sale by June: Mines Secy

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

The government will put on sale around 20 critical mineral blocks in the fourth round of auction by the end of June, mines secretary VL Kantha Rao said on Monday.

Rao further said that the auction process for seven critical mineral blocks put on sale in the first round is almost complete and the result would be declared in a month's time.

Critical minerals such as copper, lithium, nickel, cobalt and rare earth elements are essential components in many of today's rapidly growing clean energy technologies — from wind turbines and electricity networks to electric vehicles. Demand for these minerals is growing quickly with clean energy transitions gathering pace.

The government's focus on the critical mineral exploration is at the highest, he said.

The mines ministry, he said, will also start the auction of offshore mines in another three months' time.

The government had earlier said that it has cancelled the auction for 13 of the 20 blocks put on sale in the first tranche as the response was lukewarm.

Of the 20 blocks on offer, 56 physical bids and 56 online bids were received for 18 blocks.

Among the cancelled blocks, seven mines have been notified for auction under the third round. The second round of auction covering six blocks have been completed as per schedule. The decision on kundol, nickel and chromium blocks in Gujarat will be taken by the designated officer in due course of time, the statement had said.

The Centre has launched the auction of 38 critical and strategic minerals to date. *—PTI*

Govt's focus on critical minerals is at the highest *PHOTO: PTI*

Will decide on Hindustan Zinc OFS after testing market, says govt

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

The government is committed to offloading its stake in Vedanta group firm Hindustan Zinc through offer for sale (OFS) and will take the decision on this after testing the market, mines secretary VL Kantha Rao said on Monday.

The government, the largest minority shareholder in Hindustan Zinc, owns a 29.54 per cent stake in the company.

When asked to comment on when the offer for Sale Company is expected, Rao said, "There is no point doing OFS when the market is not ready. Let me test the market…do the roadshow and then we will decide."

The Supreme Court in 2021 allowed the government to disinvest its residual stake in Hindustan Zinc in the open market.

Earlier, Hindustan Zinc had said that it will continue to engage with the Centre on its proposal to split the company into different entities, a top official said.

The company had said it is still in talks with the mines ministry on the proposal and is trying to address some issues.

The Vedanta group firm had announced plans to spin off its businesses into separate entities, including zinc and silver, to increase its market capitalisation.

It had said the company's board decided to undertake a 'comprehensive review of its corporate structure for unlocking potential value'.

Hindustan Zinc is engaged in zinc, lead and silver businesses. *—PTI*

SC in 2021 allowed the government to disinvest in Zinc *PHOTO: PTI*

India ranks top in world AI race

New Delhi, 29 April

The intelligent data infrastructure company NetApp recently released report on cloud complexity suggests a clear division between countries at the forefront and those behind on the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI). The report provides global insights into the progress, readiness, challenges and momentum on AI adoption and the critical role of a unified data infrastructure in achieving AI success. According to the NetApp report nations such as India, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States are leading the charge on AI adoption and innovation. AI leaders are also more likely to report benefits from AI, including a 50 per cent increase in production rates, 46 per cent in the automation of routine activities and 45 per cent improvement in customer experience. Nations that are proactive in embracing AI technology are likely to enjoy significant advantages in sectors, including finance, healthcare, and manufacturing. *—ANI*

CRISIL REPORT

India Inc marks slowest quarterly revenue growth

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

Corporates in India have likely logged a 4-6 per cent revenue growth in the January-March quarter, marking the slowest quarterly growth since recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic began in September 2021, as per an analysis of 350 companies (excluding financial services and oil and gas sectors) by Crisil Ratings.

The moderation is, though, on a higher base of the past year.

Among the 47 sectors monitored by Crisil, only 12 are expected to have clocked an improvement in revenue growth both sequentially and year-on-year for the quarter.

Consumer discretionary products and services likely led the show in the quarter. Among discretionary products, the automobile sector was steered by healthy growth in passenger vehicles on the back of higher volumes and price hikes in the past year.

In the cement sector, despite steady demand momentum during the quarter, revenue growth remained moderate as prices were under pressure amid higher supply and intense competition, Crisil Ratings said.

Miren Lodha, Senior Director, CRISIL MI&A Research, "Even with slower revenue growth in March Quarter, corporate revenue is estimated to have grown 8 per cent in fiscal 2024. In fiscal 2025, revenue growth should improve to 9-10 per cent, driven by sectors less dependent on commodities and largely catering to the domestic market. Consumer discretionary segments, comprising both goods and services, will grow despite easing of the post-pandemic release of pent-up demand. Growth in the consumer staples segment will pick up pace owing to resumption of rural demand."

On the margin front, an improvement of 100 basis points (100 basis points is equal to 1 per cent point) is estimated on year in the March quarter. Overall earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation (Ebitda) margin for 350 companies continued to expand through fiscal 2024. *—ANI*

- Despite steady demand momentum during the quarter, revenue growth remained moderate as prices were under pressure amid higher supply and intense competition

Geopolitical tensions impacts demands *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

'Global uncertainties may impact exports'

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

The escalating geopolitical tension may have implications for the country's exports in the first quarter of 2024-25 as it is likely to impact global demand, apex exporters body FIEO said.

The global uncertainties caused by continuing war between Russia and Ukraine has impacted India's outbound shipments in 2023-24, which recorded a decline of 3.11 per cent to USD 437 billion. Imports too dipped by over 8 per cent to USD 677.24 billion.

When asked about the impact of Israel-Iran war, he said certain exporters from engineering sector have stated that the demand for goods that are going to the UAE and then to Iran has come down.

Jewellery demand may also come down, he said.

The director general suggested the government to take certain steps for exporters at the liquidity front.

On 8 December, 2023, Union Cabinet approved an additional allocation of Rs 2,500 crore for the continuation of the scheme up to 30 June.

The scheme helps exporters from identified sectors and all MSME manufacturer exporters to avail of rupee export credit at competitive rates at a time when the global economy is facing headwinds. Exporters get subsidies under the 'Interest Equalisation Scheme for pre- and post-shipment rupee export credit.

Technology and knowledge-based sectors like electronics, electricals, telecommunication, machinery, and diagnostics would help achieve USD one trillion exports by 2030. *—PTI*

BOOST IN TOURISM

Foreign tourist arrivals in India will cross pre-pandemic level

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

Despite geopolitical tensions India's tourism industry braces for a surge of more than 10 per cent in inbound tourism this year. Industry experts cite escalating conflicts in West Asia and shift of foreign tourists from China after the pandemic as key factors propelling India into the spotlight as a preferred destination for travellers worldwide.

Recent tourism data indicates an annual growth of 305.4 per cent in foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) in 2023. In 2023, 9.23 million foreign tourists visited India. Although the FTAs arrival number is still less than the pre-pandemic number of 10.93 million in 2019, experts believe in 2024 we might cross the FTAs arrival number of pre-pandemic days.

Moreover, the recent orders of Indian airlines to acquire over 1000 aircraft will further boost India's tourism sector by providing enhanced accessibility and connectivity for foreign tourists. In last one-year Air India, Indigo and Akasha have together ordered 1120 aircraft from Boeing and Airbus. Also, the number of airports in India has doubled to 149 in the last ten years, this will boost new tourism destinations in India.

With the construction of Ram temple, Ayodhya too is attracting foreign tourists.

As the world looks towards Asia for travel opportunities, India stands poised to capitalize on this momentum, leveraging its unique attractions and hospitality to welcome travellers from across the globe.

He also highlighted the unparalleled appeal of India as a tourist destination, attributing the nation's diverse offerings, from rich cultural heritage to pristine beaches and tantalizing cuisine, as driving forces behind its increasing popularity among global travellers.

The government had declared the year 2023 as the Visit India year 2023 in a bid to position India as a 360-degree holistic destination in the major international source markets

Ministry of Tourism in collaboration with the overseas Indian Missions participated in major international travel exhibitions like FITUR to promote the industry. By 2028, India's tourism and hospitality industry is projected to generate revenue of over USD 59 billion. Additionally, Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) are anticipated to reach 30.5 million by 2028. The foreign exchange earnings in 2023 were USD 28.07 billion.

With expectations running high, industry stakeholders anticipate a transformative period for India's tourism landscape, propelled by strategic investments and a renewed focus on promoting the country's rich cultural tapestry through initiatives such as the "Incredible India" campaign. *—ANI*

Tourism data shows growth of 300.5 per cent in FTAs in 2023 *PHOTO: PTI*

Eyes on LSG skipper Rahul as T-20 selection looms

One final chance to claim second wicketkeeper's spot

LUCKNOW, 29 APRIL

With T20 World Cup selection round the corner, KL Rahul will have one final chance to stake claim on the second wicketkeeper's spot in the Indian team when Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) host Mumbai Indians (MI) in the Indian Premier League here on Tuesday.

Rahul's strike-rate in T20 cricket has always been a bone of contention. Despite the advantage of field restrictions in the Powerplay, Rahul has often started his innings on a slow note in the IPL. However, the LSG captain has managed to change gears this season. In the 2024 edition, he has scored 378 runs at a strike rate of 144.27 but it is still less than that of Rishabh Pant (160.60) and Sanju Samson (161.08).

While comeback man Pant has all but sealed the first wicketkeeper's spot in the marquee event in the Caribbean islands and the USA in June by displaying some sharp work behind the stumps and sensational knocks with the bat, Samson has also made a strong case for himself by playing match-winning knocks for Rajasthan Royals at a brisk pace. In such a scenario, Rahul needs to play more fearlessly *—PTI*

Rahul's strike-rate in T20 has always been a bone of contention ***PHOTO: PTI***

SANJU LIKELY TO BE FIRST-CHOICE WICKETKEEPER

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

Rajasthan Royals (RR) skipper Sanju Samson is likely to be India's first choice wicket-keeper-batter for the ICC T20 World Cup this year, taking place in West Indies and USA from 1 June.

Rishabh Pant, who made his return to competitive cricket this IPL after a car accident in 2022, Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) skipper KL Rahul and Mumbai Indians (MI) star Ishan Kishan are other players in contention for the spot the primary keeper-batter for the tournament. *—ANI*

TODAY'S MATCH

MUMBAI INDIANS vs LUCKNOW SUPER GIANTS

Time: 7.30 pm
Where To Watch:
Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network
Stadium: Ekana Cricket Stadium Lucknow

OLYMPIC QUALIFIERS

WFI names unchanged wrestling squad

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) has named almost the same squad that competed in the Asian Qualifiers in Bishkek for the final Olympic Qualifying tournament in Istanbul next month due to paucity of time to conduct fresh trials.

The squad for the World Olympic Games Qualifiers (WOGQ) in Istanbul from May 9-13 will remain the same, except leaving out three wrestlers -- 2018 Asian Games gold medallist Vinesh Phogat (50kg), Anshu Malik (57kg) and U23 world champion Reetika (76kg) -- as they had sealed quota places in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, last month.

It is learnt that the WFI was unhappy with the poor show by the Indian men's team in Bishkek and was planning to conduct fresh trials to select the team for the final Olympic qualifying event.

But a WFI source said due to "very limited time" between the Asian Olympic qualifiers in Bishkek and the Istanbul event, it was forced to shelve the idea to conduct fresh trials.

Indian grapplers stand a good chace of clinching a few more Paris Games berths in Istanbul as 54 Olympic quota places in each of the six weight classes of the three wrestling styles are up for grabs.

"Every weight category offers three Paris Olympic spots -- one each to the two finalists and one to the winner of the playoff between the two bronze medallists," said United World Wrestling (UWW) in a statement on Monday.

"Greco-Roman will kick off the competition on 9 May followed by women's wrestling and freestyle finishing it on 13 May," the UWW statement added. *—PTI*

Thomas Cup: India seals quarterfinal berth

CHENGDU, 29 APRIL

Defending champions India sailed to the knockout stage of the Thomas Cup with a 5-0 rout of England in a Group C contest here on Monday.

India, who defeated Thailand 4-1 in their opening tie, notched up a second consecutive win to qualify for the quarterfinals. HS Prannoy returned to winning ways, defeating Harry Huang 21-15 21-15 to give India a 1-0 lead.

"To give a start to the team is really important, it gives a good boost to the team to go ahead. It is really important to finish off the matches clinically, you saw against Thailand one match was bad for us. So it's important to finish off the matches clinically," Prannoy said after his match.

The star pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty was stretched to three games by Ben Lane and Sean Vendy in the first doubles fixtures before 2022 world champions bronze medallist picked up a 21-17 19-21 21-15 win in one hour five minutes.Former world number one Kidambi Srikanth recorded a 21-16 21-11 victory over Nadeem Dalvi to give India an unassailable 3-0 lead. "Happy with the way both the matches have gone for me (in the tournament). There is a lot of pressure on players to win games. I feel I have played little easier opponents so far. But from now we will face better opponents and I have to be my best," Srikanth said.On his recent form, Srikanth said "I'm playing well but not able to pull off the matches. Obviously people will compare how I was playing from 2021-2022. I was in my 20s then." The second doubles pair of MR Arjun and Dhruv Kapila then brushed aside Rory Easton and Alex Green 21-17 21-19.In the final match, 24-year-old Kiran George prevailed 21-18 21-12 over Cholan Kayan to wrap up the fixture. *—PTI*

Brijesh, Sagar, Sumit enter Asian U22 Boxing semis

ASTANA, 29 APRIL

Indian pugilists Brijesh Tamta, Sagar Jakhar and Sumit registered victories to enter the semi-finals and assure themselves of medals in the youth category of Asian U22 & Youth Boxing Championships on Monday.

Brijesh (48kg) started the day in a hard-fought bout against Uzbekistan's Sabirov Sayfiddin, with both boxers winning one round each as it all came down to the third round which the youngster from India won 4-3 after the bout was reviewed.

Brijesh Tamta (48kg) poses with the support staff after his win on Monday at Asian U-22 & Youth Boxing Championships 2024 ***PHOTO: BFI***

Meanwhile, Jadumani Singh (51kg) and Akash Gorkha (60kg) registered victories to enter the U-22 quarters.

Sagar Jakhar (60kg) and Sumit (67kg) clinched identical 5-0 victories against Thailand's Kalaseeram Thanaphansakon and Korea's Hong Seo Jin respectively. Jitesh (54kg) lost 0-5 against Kazakhstan's Tulebek Nurassyl.

With these three medals, India is now assured of eight medals in the youth category as five women boxers Annu (48kg), Parthavi Grewal (66kg), Nikita Chand (60kg), Khushi Pooniya (81kg) and Nirjhara Bana (+81kg) will start their campaigns in the semi-finals. *—PTI*

Haaland returns and scores as Man City beats Nottingham Forest 2-0

NOTTINGHAM, 29 APRIL

Erling Haaland came off the bench and sealed a 2-0 win for Manchester City over Nottingham Forest in the Premier League on Sunday.

Haaland had missed the previous two games through injury and was only named as a substitute for City's trip to the City Ground. But he was quickly back among the goals after a typically deadly finish just nine minutes after coming on. Victory saw second-place City close the gap on league leader Arsenal back to one point after its title rival beat Tottenham 3-2 earlier in the day.

Haaland's goal, meanwhile, saw him move ahead of Chelsea's Cole Palmer as the league's leading scorer with 21 goals this season. City has a game in hand on Arsenal and will lift a fourth-straight title if it wins its remaining four games this season. It would also be its sixth title in seven years during a period of almost complete domestic dominance.

City went ahead in the 32nd minute through Josk Gvardiol's near-post header from Kevin De Bruyne's corner. Forest had chances to level the game with Chris Wood twice failing to provide a clinical finish from close range. Haaland then put the result beyond doubt, with De Bruyne the provider again. Collecting the ball just outside the box Haaland showed quick feet to get past Murillo and then swept a low shot into the far corner to beat Matz Sels.

A concern for City was an injury to goalkeeper Ederson who went off at halftime after appearing to hurt his shoulder.

In another incident, Chelsea defender Thiago Silva will leave the club at the end of the season. Brazilian, who joined the Blues on a free transfer from Paris St-Germain in 2020, has made 151 appearances for the Blues. *—BBC News*

PHOTO: X@ManCity

AIFF to felicitate heroes of 1974 India Youth Squad

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

On Tuesday, 30 April, 2024, the All India Football Federation will hold a function in Kolkata to felicitate the heroes of the 1974 India Youth Squad, the release said. AIFF President Kalyan Chaubey has initiated to call all living members to celebrate

—ANI

ARCHER DEEPIKA RE-INDUCTED INTO TOPS

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

Former world number one archer Deepika Kumari, who won a silver medal at the just-concluded World Cup in Shanghai, has been re-inducted into the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) core group ahead of the Paris Games, the Sports Ministry announced on Monday.

Deepika, who missed the entire season last year after becoming a mother in December 2022, recently made a comeback and has been doing well both at the domestic and international stage.

The 29-year-old recurve archer, who is a three-time Olympian, had also medalled at the Asia Cup earlier this year. *—PTI*

NZ, S Africa unveil jerseys ahead of T20 World Cup

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

New Zealand and South Africa have unveiled their jerseys ahead of the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup this year, to be held from June 1 onwards in the West Indies and the USA. The official X handle of the Kiwis unveiled the jersey on Monday, with the colour scheme being reminiscent of their 1990s kits. "The team's kit for the 2024 @T20WorldCup Available at the NZC store from tomorrow. #T20WorldCup," tweeted the New Zealand Cricket (NZC) official handle. Mark Chapman, James Neesham, Ish Sodhi, and Tim Southee were among the players who wore the jersey in the photo shoot. New Zealand reached the semifinals of the previous T20 WC in 2022 held in Australia, where they lost to Pakistan by seven wickets. Their best finish was the final in the 2021 edition held at UAE, where they lost to Australia. New Zealand is featured in Group C this time with West Indies, Afghanistan, Papua New Guinea and Uganda. They will play their first game against Afghanistan on 7 June. *—ANI*

Diksha moves into Top-10 of LET Order of Merit

CAPE TOWN, 29 APRIL

Indian golfer Diksha Dagar moved into the Top-10 of the Ladies European Tour's Order of Merit after another creditable finish at the Investec South African Women's Open. Diksha is now ninth on the LET, with 455 points. England's Bronte Law is on top, followed by this week's winner Manon de Roey of Belgium. Pranavi Urs is the next best Indian at 25th place in her rookie year. Diksha, who was third on the LET in 2023 with one win in Tipsport Czech Republic and Top-3 finishes in Amundi German Masters and the Hero Women's Indian Open, has now had three Top-10s in 2024. With the LET taking a break this week, Diksha will be back in action at the Aramco Ladies Korea next week along with Pranavi Urs. In the next LET event, the Indians in action are Diksha, Pranavi and Vani Kapoor. *—PTI*

Velavan Senthilkumar wins Batch Open squash

PARIS, 29 APRIL

India's Velavan Senthilkumar secured his eighth Professional Squash Association Tour title by winning the Batch Open Challenger event. World No 58 Senthilkumar beat Frenchman Melvil Scianimanico 11-6, 11-9, 11-6 in the final on Sunday. "Melvil played really well and there was a lot of crowd support for him as well. I had to be sharp from the start till the end, and I'm glad I could do that," said top seed Senthilkumar who hails from Chennai. *—PTI*

National Women's Hockey League to start in Ranchi

NEW DELHI, 29 APRIL

National Women's Hockey League 2024-2025 is set to make its grand debut on Tuesday, promising display of talent and teamwork as India's top state teams converge in Ranchi in Jharkhand for the maiden edition. The league will unfold in two phases, commencing with its inaugural leg scheduled from 30 April to 9 May in Ranchi. All matches during the first leg of the tournament will be hosted at the Marang Gomke Jaipal Singh Astroturf Hockey Stadium. In the first phase of the tournament, a total of 28 league matches will be played, promising an action-packed spectacle for hockey enthusiasts and fans across the country, the release added. *—ANI*

MADRID OPEN

Swiatek, Haddad cruise into QF

MADRID, 29 APRIL

The World No.1 Iga Swiatek advanced into her second Madrid Open quarterfinal after a masterclass performance against Sara Sorribes Tormo.

Playing on the Manolo Santana, Swiatek registered a 6-1, 6-0 triumph over home favourite Sorribes Tormo, dropping just one game.

The Pole is bidding for a maiden title at the only clay-court tournament at the WTA 1000 level or above.

In the match, the Pole was at her absolutely best as despite giving up the lead early in the game she recovered well and booked her place in the quarterfinal.

With three careless forehand errors and a double fault in the first game, Swiatek gave up the easy lead. But she didn't let that be the end of it. Instead, she exploited her sheer pace and margins to force few errors from the Sorribes Tormo racquet.

PHOTO: X/@MADRIDOPEN

PHOTO: X/@MADRIDOPEN

Meanwhile, The No.11 seeded Beatriz Haddad Maia reached her second quarterfinal of the season and first in Madrid as she defeated Maria Sakkari 6-4, 6-4 in the Round of 16 clash of the ongoing Madrid Open on Monday.

The Brazilian is now 4-0 overall against Sakkari after defeating the No 5 seed 6-4, 6-4, her 11th career Top 10 win and second of 2024. The No 11 seeded Haddad Maia will play her quarterfinal match against World No 1 Iga Swiatek.

In the third round of the Toronto Open in 2022, Swiatek fell to Haddad Maia for the first time in her career. The Brazilian utilized the heartbreaking 6-4, 3-6, 7-5 loss as motivation to advance to her first WTA 1000 final. *—ANI*

Medvedev, Zverev see victory

MADRID, 29 APRIL

The World No.4 Daniil Medvedev on Monday produced a stunning performance to overcome a stern test from Sebastian Korda at the Madrid Openseal a spot in the Round of 16.

Rafael Nadal overcame a big scare to seal his place in the last 16 of the Madrid Open Medvedev came within two points of defeat before finally advancing with a 5-7, 7-6(4), 6-3 victory over Korda after a battle that lasted for two hours and 23 minutes.

As the match progressed in a close contest, the 28-year-old began to smash more frequently to Korda's forehand, while the American's backhand remained steady for extended stretches of play. Despite making 24 unintentional mistakes during the match, Medvedev persevered at critical junctures, holding serve from 4-5, deuce in the second set.

PHOTO: X/@MADRIDOPEN

PHOTO: X/@MADRIDOPEN

Following the successful conversion of his second set point in the second set, Medvedev won the ninth game and went on to advance after two hours and twenty-three minutes. Alexander Zverev of Germany defeated Denis Shapovalov of Richmond Hill, Ont., 6-4, 7-5 on Sunday in the third round of the Madrid Open.

The fourth-seeded Zverev will move on to face No. 21 seed Francisco Cerundolo, who dispatched Tommy Paul 6-7 (7), 6-4, 6-2 in his third round match. Carlos Alcaraz continued to make a successful return from injury.Alcaraz won 6-3, 6-3 for his second straight victory in his first tournament after skipping Monte Carlo and Barcelona because of an arm injury. *—ANI*